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Preface

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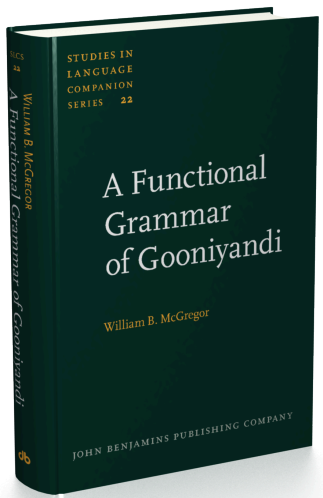

Pages v–viii of
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William B. McGregor
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PREFACE

This book is a revision of my University of Sydney PhD thesis (McGregor 1984b). It extends and refines that description in various ways; in a few places analyses have been revised. In a couple of cases the revised analyses have already appeared in print, or are forthcoming (e.g. the description of information (McGregor 1986a) and the account of clause complexes and mood (McGregor 1988a)). These have been included here — in somewhat further revised form, and minus the extensions into matters of the wider theoretical implications — largely for the sake of descriptive completeness: the book is intended to stand on its own as a description of the grammar of Gooniyandi, up to a certain degree of delicacy.

My primary aim here, as it was in my PhD thesis, is to account for meaning: how Gooniyandi speakers mean with their language. I believe that systemic functional grammar provides the linguistic model most suited to this purpose, and the description falls broadly into that tradition. It is most influenced by the variety of systemic functional grammar elaborated in Halliday's *Introduction to functional grammar* (Halliday 1985). Like *Introduction to functional grammar*, this is not a systemic grammar in the usual sense of the term, and there are few system networks. This is not just for the reasons set out in Halliday (1985:x, xxvii), but also because this approach, which is more closely tied to linguistic forms and their contextual meanings, seems to have more to recommend it in terms of the goals of the present work.

However, I have not restricted myself exclusively either to the sorts of questions systemicists normally ask, or to the answers they typically provide. For instance, the description of word morphology and many aspects of the approach to lexical semantics borrow little from systemic functional theory.

Particular emphasis has been placed on argumentation, a consideration which has been consistently ignored in systemic theorising. I have attempted to argue for the analyses presented, rather than merely assert them, even though this has increased the length of the book considerably. In my opinion, the method of argumentation is one of the most interesting aspects of linguistic theorising, and it is only through careful consideration of the methods of

argumentation employed, the types of data considered to be evidence for particular claims, that a theory can be really understood.

Being functional in its theoretical orientation, the present account breaks in a number of respects from the current Australianist tradition, typified by works such as Dixon (1972 and 1977), and the *Handbook of Australian Languages* (Dixon and Blake 1979). Superficially, there are many organisational resemblances with works in this dominant framework. The same introduction (the language and its speakers), phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics organisation is employed in essence, if not in slavish detail. However, there are some marked divergences in the treatment of particular phenomena, and certain issues which have been in the theoretical limelight — for instance, cross-clausal coreference constraints, syntactic ergativity, and so on — have been passed over. I make no apology for these omissions; in any case, the keen reader will be able to test out his or her hypotheses on the numerous examples included in the body of the text, and the example texts in Appendix 1. On the other hand, certain matters which have been largely ignored in Australianist studies have been accorded an important place here: verbless or relational clauses, the structure of the noun phrase, and the semantics of enclitics and particles, for example.

I do not see it as incumbent on myself to explicitly justify each departure from tradition, or to demonstrate that my analyses are superior to the traditional analyses. The onus of proof lies as much on upholders of traditional analyses to justify their accounts, and more particularly, the validity of their accounts with respect to Gooniyandi, as it does on me to justify mine. I have thus generally been content to argue for my analyses by adducing language internal evidence, without making detailed comparisions with other possible analyses.

This book stops short of text analysis, restricting itself to grammatical (in the wide sense of the word) phenomena pure and simple. This is partly because I believe that text studies involve a reorientation to a different semiotic plane to that of grammar, and thus should be dealt with in a separate volume; it is also partly because of practical considerations of space. An investigation of textual organisation is planned for a later publication. On the other hand, at various points in the exposition I refer to textual phenomena and characteristics of the organisation of discourse in Gooniyandi, as they are relevant to the understanding of the grammar — in other words, there is leakage between the semiotic planes, due in part to the fact that the structure of language reflects its functions (Halliday 1985:xiii). Thus, Appendix 1 includes three sample texts not for the purpose of analysis, but for illustration of the grammatical points made

in the body of the book, and as a small corpus for testing my arguments and claims.

This study would not have been possible were it not for the continued support, endurance and friendship of Jack Bohemia (*nyibaddi*) who, during my field trips, worked patiently with me daily for long hours despite his advanced age, telling me stories and answering intricate (and often foolish) questions. It has taken me a long time to understand that his responses were invariably more revealing and insightful than my prompts. I am convinced that this study would have been not only vastly different conceptually, but also incomparably better had I been willing to allow him to take on the role of language teacher instead of linguist's informant.

I also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to other Gooniyandi and Bunuba men and women who contributed substantially to the project. These include Dave Lamey, Joe Dimay, Bigfoot *jagadda*, David Street, Lanis P. (deceased), Saturday W. (deceased), Banjo Birndayminy, Rainbow, Mick Smith, and George Nayndu. Teaching is a two way process, and I gained much from my involvement with the Yiyili Community School, where Norman Cox, Ivy Cox, Judy Cox, Dorris Cox, Frank Cox, Irene, Jocelin, Penny Madeline, Lyon, and Mervin Street assisted my studies more, perhaps, than I helped them.

Over the past nine years Howard Coate has generously permitted me access to his fieldnotes and recordings in various languages, including Gooniyandi. In addition, he has provided hospitality in what is to me the field, and to him, home, and has proved a rare and abiding friend. It is impossible to adequately express my indebtedness to him.

Barbara Jones and Robin Dickinson, (Fitzroy Crossing Preschool), Keith Ware (United Aborigines Mission), Joyce Hudson and Eirlys Richards (Summer Institute of Linguistics) and many other friends and acquaintances made my 1980 and 1982 stays in Fitzroy Crossing more pleasant and profitable. I am particularly grateful to Robin Dickinson for providing transportation to many out-of-the-way places.

The fieldwork on which this description is based was partly supported by financial assistance from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. The Linguistics Department of the University of Sydney assisted by providing cassette recorders and tapes. The support of both of these bodies is gratefully acknowledged.

Michael Halliday and Alan Rumsey have been involved with my investigations of Gooniyandi from the start. Michael Halliday introduced me to systemic linguistics, and provided convincing demonstration of its usefulness as

a descriptive model. Alan Rumsey steered me towards Gooniyandi in the first place, and eased my way into the field situation in various ways. He provided continued encouragement through the first five years of the project, and kept me continually aware of the need for a catholic approach to description. Both Michael Halliday and Alan Rumsey provided detailed comments on many preliminary versions of this work. Needless to say, responsibility for any shortcomings in the present work rests entirely with me.

A number of other people provided useful comments and criticisms on various aspects of the analysis, including Barry Blake, Svetlana Byrne, Bob Dixon, Barbara Horvath, Jim Martin, Patrick McConvell, Igor Melcuk, Cate Poynton, Tasaku Tsunoda, Michael Walsh and David Wilkins. Tasaku Tsunoda also permitted me access to his recordings of Gooniyandi, and Bronwyn Stokes has made various unpublished manuscripts available to me.

The entire manuscript was typed onto computer by myself, and and later typeset, again by myself, on Macintosh computers in the Department of Linguistics at La Trobe University. The use of these facilities is greatly appreciated; without them, this book could not have been produced at anything like the present standard of quality. During a short period of employment in the University of Melbourne, I also had access to computing facilities to continue the frustrating and sometimes overwhelming task of typesetting. I would also like to thank the Linguistics Department of the Research School of Pacific Studies for permission to use their phonetic font, Phonetic Century Schoolbook.

John Verhaar has always replied promptly and with encouragement to my many editorial queries. Various staff members in the Publishing Department of John Benjamins have also provided useful advice. It has been a pleasure to work with them all.