Language tutorial on Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru

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Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru are two closely related and mutually intelligible varieties which together constitute the only language still in active use of the Western Mirndi branch of the Mirndi language family of northern Australia. The language is not acquired by children; there are now probably fewer than 50, mostly elderly speakers. The language of daily interaction in the area is Kriol, an English-lexified Creole language. All examples come from first-hand fieldwork with native speakers.

The first session of the tutorial will provide a general introduction to the language and its speakers, and subsequently focus on clausal and phrasal syntax, in particular on the interplay of information structure and argument structure and the role of information structure in accounting for the variable constituent order at clause level.

The second session will be devoted to semantic issues, including the semantics of classificatory verbs, pluractionality, and modality.

Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru has two "verbal" parts of speech: inflecting verbs form a closed class of roots which obligatorily inflect for tense/aspect, modality, and person; these regularly combine with uninflecting verbs which constitute an open class of semantically specific items. Due to their semantically generic nature, the choice of inflecting verb amounts to an overt classification of events.

Pluractional marking is much more pervasive in discourse than nominal quantification, with a formal differentiation of complex spatial configurations (marked by lexical suppletion), distributivity (marked by reduplication), iterativity (marked by a clitic on the predicate), and collective/pairwise action (marked by a clitic with variable position).

The modal system exhibits a strict separation of epistemic and non-epistemic modality, and within the latter, a basic contrast between realistic and hypothetical modality; all modals are underspecified for modal force, i.e. lack a contrast between possibility and necessity.