8 'I'M GOING TO WHERE-HER-BRISKET-IS': PLACENAMES IN THE ROPER

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1 INTRODUCTION¹

In the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe, we find many placenames that can be characterised as a compound of a *generic* term for a topographic feature or habitation, together with a *specific* or *modifying* term characterising that place with reference to a person, a characteristic, historical or mythological event, or some other topographic or habitation term; some examples are presented in (1).²

- (1) a. Salt Creek, Roper River
- b. East Hills
- c. Chilton, Dutton, Petersham
- d. Sherwood

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² Abbreviations: 1, 12, 2, 3: 1st, 1st incl., 2nd, 3rd person; NC: noun class (I-IV); O: object; pl: plural; S: subject; sg: singular; sp: species; ABL: ablative; ALL: allative; AUX: auxiliary, finite verb stem; COM: comitative; DAT: dative; DEF: definite; DU: dual; ERG: ergative; F/FE: feminine noun class/gender; F/FUT: future; NP: Non-Past prefix; LAT: lative; LOC: locative; M/MA: masculine noun class/gender; N/NE: neuter noun class/gender; O: object; OBL: oblique; PC: past continuous; PNEG/PRNEG/FNEG: past/present/future negative suffixes; POSS: possessive; POT: potential; PP: past punctual, present perfective; PR: present (continuous); RECIP: reciprocal; RED: reduplication; REL: relative/subordinator; RR: reflexive/reciprocal; VE: vegetable noun class; Boundary symbols: '+' separates verbs from their tense inflections, '=' separates coverb from auxiliary; '-' is the general morphological boundary.

Map 2: Placenames around Roper Bar

Table 1: Key to Placenames in Maps 1 and 2³

1	Awarabankawinjin	14	Nawarnbarnkulyi
2	Balalayarrurru	15	Ngalardarra binkulinma
3	Baltjjardatbutjjinygah	16	Ngurruboy
4	Bunditjgah	17	Riwanji
5	Burrrhburminygah	18	Walanji
6	Golotdoh	19	Wandarrganiny
7	Gurdanggapbul	20	Yandah-jandah
8	Jalboy	21	Wankarnangintji
9	Jarrburdetjbutjjinygah	22	Wararrirr
10	Jilmiyunginy	23	Wudbudbalanji(n)ji
11	Larriboy	24	Yinbirryunginy
12	Nabarlmanitji	25	Yurende
13	Nabordopburlani	26	Yurlhbunji

³ A practical orthography for Roper languages has been developed by Diwurruwurru-Jaru (the Katherine Language Centre) and Batchelor College and is employed throughout the paper: syllable-initial *b, d, rd, j, g* are short and mostly voiced stops: bilabial, apico-alveolar, apico-postalveolar, lamino-alveopalatal and velar respectively. Syllable-finally, these stops are represented with the corresponding voiceless symbols: *p, t, rt, tj, k*. The digraphs *pb, td, rtd, tjj, kg* represent geminate (long, tense, and voiceless) versions of the same stops. The symbol *h* represents a glottal stop following sonorants, and lamino-dental articulation following the symbols *t, d* in Ngandi, Nunggubuyu. Nasals corresponding to the stops are *m, n, rn, ny, ng*, laterals *l, rl*, tap *rr* and labio-velar, retroflex and palatal approximants *w, r, y*. Digraphs: retroflexion is indicated once only in clusters: *rnd, rtd*, represent [ɳd], [ɳt]; *nk* represents an alveolar nasal + velar stop [nk], contrast *ngg* for [ŋg], and similarly *nj* and *ntj* represent homorganic [ɲj] and heterorganic [ɲj] respectively. Various conventions have been followed with respect to heterorganic nasal+stop clusters in the area, the convention followed here is not ideal but is consistent.

1.1 The linguistic context⁴

There are six language groups associated with the Roper River drainage basin. The list in (2) gives a rough location for each (and see Map 1).⁵ The order proceeds from the Roper source to the mouth.⁶

- (2) **Mangarrayi**, centred on the community of Jilkmirnkan (Duck Creek, Jembere) near Elsey Station, and up to Maiwok Creek;
Ngalakgan, around the south-flowing tributaries of the middle Roper: Flying Fox Creek and the Wilton River, centred on the community of Urapunga and the outstation of Bardawarrkga;
Alawa, centred on the community of Minyerri (Hodgson Downs), and around the north-flowing tributaries of the Roper: the Hodgson and Arnold Rivers;
Ngandi, traditionally spoken in an area north of the Roper around the upper portions of the Phelp and Rose Rivers, and around Turkey Lagoon Creek just north of Ngukurr;
Warndarrang, spoken around the Roper mouth and along a narrow strip of coastline north and south;
Marra, traditionally spoken south of the Roper on the coast around the Limmen Bight and Towns Rivers.

Warndarrang (Heath 1980) became extinct in the 1970s. Clans that formerly spoke Warndarrang are now affiliated with Ngandi or Marra language groups (Bern 1974), and hence these languages can now be said to be affiliated more closely with the Roper than they were formerly. In addition, a language called 'Yukgul' (i.e. [júkkul]) by Ngalakgan and Alawa speakers, or [júgul] by Marra speakers, is said to have occupied the area around Ngukurr (on the Roper, about 50 kilometres from the Gulf of Carpentaria), and the country to the south. This language is unrecorded, but is said (by Marra speakers) to have been 'like' Marra.

The question of what happened to Yukgul speakers is not easy to answer. There are several extant clans which are associated with estates within the territory said to have been formerly Yukgul. The members of these clans in every case have switched linguistic affiliation to one of the neighbouring groups — Marra, Alawa, Ngalakgan, or Yanyuwa. What this means is

⁴ My conventions for citing placenames are as follows:

- when a placename (Indigenous or introduced) is discussed as a name it is given in italics;
- when a placename (Indigenous or introduced) current in English or other European languages is mentioned as a place it is given in plain type;
- words of Indigenous languages are given in italics;
- glosses for meanings of placenames are given in single inverted commas;
- when the phonetic or phonological status of words of Indigenous languages is under discussion, these are given in plain IPA font.

⁵ This map represents an estimate of land–language associations immediately before European contact. Territoriality in the area is the subject of ongoing research, therefore the map should not be taken to be definitive in any sense. Numbers on Map 1 and Map 2 correspond to the placenames in Table (1), which represents a selection of unanalysable placenames discussed in the paper.

⁶ Language names, abbreviations and sources for language data are as follows: Alwa: Alawa (Sharpe 1972); GN: Gunwinyguan (Alpher, Evans and Harvey to appear); Dlbn: Dalabon (Merlan 1993, Evans 1995); Jwyn: Jawoyn (Merlan 1989b); Mgry: Mangarrayi (Merlan 1989c); Mrra: Marra (Heath 1980); Myli: Mayali (Evans 2000); Ngkn: Ngalakgan (Merlan 1983, Baker 1999); Ngdi: Ngandi (Heath 1978b); Rmba: Rembarnga (McKay 1975); Wndg: Warndarrang (Heath 1980).

that these people are now said to be 'Marra' or 'Ngalakgan' (whether or not a person actually speaks a language is irrelevant to this kind of identification: Merlan 1981). The way in which this switch came about was perhaps through temporary succession to the estate of a Yukgul clan by a neighbouring clan of the same semi-moiety (Bern & Layton 1984:74).⁷ By 'temporary', I mean that the knowledgeable Elders of the neighbouring clan agree to assist with the spiritual duties expected of clan members weakened for whatever reason.⁸ Some placenames which possibly include Yukgul morphology are examined in §3.2.

Ngalakgan and Ngandi are related to each other, and to a large group of languages spoken in central Arnhem Land given the name 'Gunwinyguan'. The basis for the claim that these languages are related rests on their shared verb inflectional morphology (see Alpher, Evans & Harvey to appear, Heath 1978a). More immediately, Ngalakgan is very closely related to Rembarrnga, spoken to the north from Bulman to the middle Blyth River. Ngandi is more closely related to Nunggubuyu, spoken to the north of Warndarrang around Numbulwar (Heath 1978a, Baker 1996). Mangarrayi is argued by Alpher, Evans and Harvey (to appear) to be a Gunwinyguan language also, albeit a distantly related one.⁹

Much of the discussion in this paper originated in the process of preparing reports on two land claims lodged by the Northern Land Council (NLC) under the *Native Title Act*: St Vidgeon's Pastoral Lease (PL), and Urapunga Township. St Vidgeon's PL covers a large (600,000 sq. km.) area of land whose northern border is the Roper River. The township of Urapunga is a small parcel of land, immediately to the south of the Roper Bar crossing, which was gazetted in 1887. (This particular area is dotted with some important sacred sites.)

All of the languages of the Roper region are becoming moribund. Ngalakgan has just three first-language speakers, and has not been acquired by children since the 1930s or 1940s. The state of Ngandi is even more dire. Alawa and Marra are not much better off. Therefore, the linguistic uses of placenames spoken of here should be understood to refer to the limited context in which these languages are now spoken.

2 THE MORPHOLOGY OF PLACENAMES

There are no special morphological features that identify Ngalakgan placenames as such. However, in Ngalakgan, Alawa and Marra placenames behave differently from other nouns with respect to

⁷ One of my main language consultants, one of the last proficient speakers of Ngalakgan, has said on various occasions that his father's father was Yukgul, but married to a Ngalakgan woman. My consultant belongs to a clan owning an area of land north-west of Roper Bar which has apparently been associated with Ngalakgan speakers for a considerable length of time. In this case then, a Yukgul man's sons were adopted into a Ngalakgan clan of the appropriate ritual classification (i.e. semi-moiety). And indeed, now this man is an accepted authority on Ngalakgan language and ritual matters.

⁸ Almost certainly the whole area immediately around the Roper River and along the Queensland cattle route (which passed through St Vidgeon's) suffered early onslaught from disease and shooting parties (Merlan 1978).

⁹ However, Heath (1978a) claims that Alawa, Marra and Warndarrang form a distinct genetic group, based on pronominal paradigms, and noun class/case morphology; and Sharpe (nd) and Merlan (1989a) also include Mangarrayi in this group. It should be noted that verb morphology does not constitute part of their evidence for this claim and, indeed, very little can be attested in the way of specific similarities in the verbal morphology of these languages (beyond general typological similarities and a few widely distributed roots).

locative and allative case marking.¹⁰ Two endings found on a few placenames in the Ngalakgan area are otherwise not found elsewhere in the morphology. In §4, I argue that these derive from old derivational suffixes still found in neighbouring related languages such as Jawoyn. Placenames have the form of a variety of word classes in Ngalakgan: bare noun, affixed noun, inflected verb. Examples of the various types are given below in each section.

2.1 Bare nouns as placenames

Placenames that have the form of a bare noun are typically the names of species (trees/plants, birds, fish, or animals). Species names, in this area (Arnhem Land), are commonly shared among many languages of a *Sprachbund* (Heath 1978a), so it is not possible to ascribe them distinctively to any language without research into their distribution within family-level linguistic groups; examples (in Ngalakgan orthography) of placenames like this are presented in (3):

(3)	a.	<i>Dubal</i>	‘Leichhardt tree’ (<i>Nauclea coadunata</i>) Ngkn, Alwa, Mrra
	b.	<i>Jendewerretj</i>	‘willy wagtail’ Ngkn, Alwa
	c.	<i>Jalburrgitj</i>	‘brown honeyeater’ Ngkn, Alwa
	d.	<i>Ganjarri</i>	‘bonefish’ (herring sp.) Ngkn, Ngdi
	e.	<i>Mirnitjja</i>	‘shade tree’ (<i>Cathormion umbellatum</i>) Ngkn, Alwa, Mrra
	f.	<i>Jininggirrijininggirri</i>	‘willy wagtail’ Alwa, Ngkn
	g.	<i>Garrinji</i>	‘jabiru’ Alwa, Mrra
	h.	<i>Mayngu</i>	‘red ochre, red stone’ (Marra; Ngkn <i>mayngoh</i>)
	i.	<i>Motjo</i>	cf. Ngkn <i>mutjju</i> ‘coolibah tree’ (<i>E. microtheca</i>); Alwa, Mrra <i>mudju</i>

The placename *Mirnitjja* is an alternative for the longer name *Mirnitjja-ngoji-kгах* examined below. A common term in the Roper for the ‘shade tree’ found around billabongs and flood plains is *mirnitjja*. The word for coolibah tree in Ngalakgan is *mutjju* [muccu]. This word is subtly different to the Alawa and Marra term for the tree, *mudju* [mutcu], which has a cluster of /t/ plus /c/ sounds, whereas the Ngalakgan word has a long lamino-palatoalveolar stop /cc/, written *tjj*. The placename *Motjo* on the Roper is different from both of these, it is pronounced [mɔtco] by Ngalakgan speakers, i.e. with the same /t/ plus /c/ cluster as Alawa (written differently in Ngalakgan). This name appears to be a phonological adaptation into Ngalakgan of the term for ‘coolibah’ in Alawa and Marra, rather than a straight translation of the Alawa term to the Ngalakgan one (which appears to be an old borrowing).¹¹ We speculate that the placename preserves an older form of the word, just as the

¹⁰ For example, in Marra, Heath (1981:92) notes that placenames and demonstratives take two special suffixes: noncentripetal *-nyindi* and a rare suffix *-nyinkarr* (‘from...to’), and that cardinal direction adverbs and placenames take a special allomorph of the ablative suffix.

¹¹ Alawa and Marra lack the vowel /o/ as a phoneme. Ngalakgan words with /o/ correspond to Alawa or Marra words with /a/ or /u/, e.g. Ngkn *morrordinh* Mrra *ngurrirdin* ‘bush banana’ (*Leichhardtia australis*). The correspondence m:ɲ is sporadically found among languages in the area.

English placename *Each* preserves the dative singular of the word for 'oak' (ǣc) in Old English (Gelling 1984:218), which became obsolete in Modern English.

There remain a number of placenames that appear to contain lexical stems but which are not entirely analysable. One name (4a) was said to contain an Alawa word for 'stone knife' *limbirr* (this word does not occur in Sharpe's dictionary of Alawa), and the place is associated with a stone dreaming, but the other part has no identifiable meaning. Example (4b) appears to have undergone initial lenition, lenition of /g/ word-initially is a well-attested phenomenon in Alawa (Sharpe 1972). The placename is associated with a stone in the water at that place.

- (4) a. *Wundalimbirr* Alwa *limbirr* 'stone'
 b. *Wabarnda* cf. Alwa *gabarnda* 'white stone' (Ngkn *gapbarndah*).

Other placenames have more irregular forms, some examples are presented in (5).

- (5) a. *Jimaju* Translated as *gimaju* 'milky way' in Alawa, Marra.
 b. *Andawu/Arnawunban* ('Lancewood yard' in Hodgson Downs) cf. Alwa *arnawun* 'lancewood', and *banban* 'flat woomera', a weapon commonly made from the wood.

At least in the case of the Ngalakgan placenames in (3), those names that are tree species terms (e.g. *Motjo* 'coolibah') refer to actual trees of that species which still stand at that place, or did until recently. I examine the reference of these tree names further in §6. As noted, these named, specific trees are the synchronic manifestations of the dreaming ancestors. In other cases, such as *Ganjarri* ('bonefish'), the name refers to the dreaming ancestor itself associated with that place. More common than bare species names are nouns inflected for locative case. These are the subject of the next section.

2.2 Inflected nouns as placenames

Aside from pure lexical items, many names along the Plains Kangaroo track are clearly Ngalakgan in origin, and cannot be derived from any other nearby language. These are names that carry distinctively Ngalakgan morphological material such as affixes. While in some cases the affixes may be shared with neighbouring languages such as Dalabon or Rembarnga, the combination of lexical items and affixes in most cases can only be Ngalakgan.

A number of names (shown in 6) carry the Ngalakgan feminine dative pronominal enclitic *-ngoji*, either alone or in combination with a following locative suffix *-kgah* ~ *-gah*.

- (6) a. *Berre-ngoji-kгах*
 brisket-hers-LOC
 'At her brisket' or 'Where her brisket is'
 b. *Bolkgotj-ngoji-kгах*
 backbone-hers-LOC
 'Where her backbone is'
 c. *Mirnitjja-ngoji-kгах*
 shade.tree-hers-LOC
 'Where her shade trees are'

- d. *Gu-Jambay-ngoji-kgah*
IV-flat.rock-hers-LOC
'Where her flat rock is'
- e. *Manga-ngoji*
throat-hers
'Her throat'
- f. *Jawarnda-nowi*¹²
whiskers-his
'[Where] his whiskers are'
- g. *Giyarrk-ngoji-kgah*
tooth-hers-LOC
'Where her tooth is'

All these names are transparently derived from modern Ngalakgan nouns and nominal morphology. The feminine possessive enclitic *-ngoji* 'her(s)' is particular to Ngalakgan and does not occur in any of the neighbouring languages with this meaning: Rembarrnga, Mangarrayi, Alawa, Jawoyn, or Dalabon.¹³ Likewise the locative suffix *-kgah* ~ *-gah* 'at' is Ngalakgan, though not distinctively so: it also occurs in neighbouring Dalabon. The noun class prefix for neuter class *gu-* in (6d) also occurs in neighbouring Ngandi. Similarly, the placename *Dubal* in (3a) typically occurs with a vegetable noun class prefix: *mu-Dubal*. I return to the characteristics of nominal morphology on placenames in §6.

The names record the actions of dreaming ancestors in placing various body parts at the named locations. Aspects of the landscape (certain trees, billabongs, rock formations) represent these manifestations of the ancestors. In this case, the feminine possessive suffix is a reflection of the gender of the dreaming ancestor *garndalpburru*, the term for 'female plains kangaroo' (*M. antelopinus* 'antelope wallaroo'). Although this ancestor was said to have travelled in a mob of male (*jardugal*) and female kangaroos, only placenames with the feminine suffix are associated with these ancestors.¹⁴

The locative suffix in these placenames is to be interpreted as deriving a headless relative existential clause, following Harvey (1999:174): e.g. 'where her brisket is'. Relative clauses are commonly headless in Ngalakgan, and nominals can function either as (existential)

¹² The name recorded by Morphy and Morphy (1981) is *Jawarnda-ngoji-kgah*, with a feminine dative clitic. This is a place on the track of the Quiet Snake (olive python) ancestor *gurrijartbonggo*. Heath (1981:358) records a version of the taipan myth (in Marra) in which the dreaming pulls out his own whiskers.

¹³ Rembarrnga */ngadə/* and Ngandi */ʔŋttayi/* are related to the Ngalakgan form by regular sound correspondences.

¹⁴ If the placenames recorded the actions of male ancestor kangaroos we would expect forms such as **mirnitjja-nowi-kgah*, with masculine dative enclitic *-nowi*, rather than feminine *-ngoji*. Similarly, a mixed group of kangaroo ancestors would take either the masculine suffix (which is the unmarked gender) or possibly the plural dative enclitic *-borre*, although plural marking of non-human arguments is subject to well-known restrictions in Australian languages (see e.g. Merlan 1983). I note that in neighbouring related Ngandi, the cognate feminine Dative suffix *-hngutdhayi* is used for all non-human referents, as well as human females (Heath 1978b:57). This may have formally been the case in Ngalakgan also. The reasons for the exclusive use of the feminine suffix in these placenames deserves further investigation.

predicates or arguments.¹⁵ The locative suffix (and other nominal suffixes) can occur on verbs in Ngalakgan in just this sense.

Similar patterns are found in neighbouring areas. Most of the placenames to be discussed below come from the St Vidgeon's pastoral lease or contiguous areas of the Roper, in country that is marginal to the areas considered to be the Alawa and Marra 'heartlands'. Consequently, many of these names contain what looks like Alawa or Marra morphology, but cannot be straightforwardly derived from the modern languages. Most of the St Vidgeon's area is said to be owned by clans that were formerly Yukgul-speaking, a language that is now extinct. Since Yukgul is claimed (by Marra, Alawa speakers) to have been 'like Marra', we expect to find Marra-like morphology in these names.

Many placenames of the St Vidgeon's area immediately contiguous to Hodgson Downs (which is traditionally affiliated with Alawa) contain reflexes of the Alawa locative suffix. Of the 290 names in the Site Register for the St Vidgeon's claim, 250 were able to be checked and confirmed with the claimants. Of those 250, 79 (or 32 per cent) ended in one of these sequences. A few of these placenames are examined below, with suggestions as to their derivation from Alawa.

The locative suffix in Alawa takes a number of allomorphs, depending on the final consonant of the stem (Sharpe 1972), and the placenames conserve this relationship. I repeat Sharpe's summary here (with orthography adjusted to that of this paper, and ignoring irrelevant aspects):

Table 2: Alawa locative suffix allomorphy (after Sharpe 1972).

STEM	STEM+SUFFIX
-i	-irri
-V	-irr
-Y	-Ynji
-C	-Cji
-Vrr	-VndV
-VL	-VLdV

[Key: Y: semivowels {y, w}; C: oral, nasal stops; L: {l, rl, r}, V: any vowel, V2 in a suffix is the same as V1]

The first group contains names that are straightforwardly derived from Alawa, that is, their meaning is clear to a speaker of the language:

- (7) a. *Leguldu* 'Waterhole on creek that runs into Cox River'. Alwa *legul-du* 'deep depression in ground'-LOC
- b. *Linylinji* cf. Alwa *linyliny* 'special type of sloping stone found on ridges'-LOC, Ngkn 'flat stone found on ridges'

¹⁵ For example, when requesting further identification of an animal from another speaker a common strategy is to use a headless relative clause:

mu-darda *gu-mu-ngunu-ngu+n-gun?*
III-sugarbag NP-III-RED-eat+PR-REL
'[the one] that eats native honey?'

- c. *Ngarrgalirr* 'A hill to the west of *Walgundu* road'; cf. Alwa *ngarrgala* 'high bank, cliff'-LOC (*ngarrgalirr* is the regular outcome)
- d. *Erlidi* 'bottom; down'

Such names as those in (6) and (7) are not necessarily good evidence for long-term residency, as Harvey (1999) notes. This is because the names have the same linguistic status to speakers of Ngalakgan and Alawa as their English translations do: they are still recognisable as words or phrases. When recording the Plains Kangaroo dreaming story the narrator explained the meanings of the placenames by saying such things as "*Berre-ngoji-kgah, imin libim briskit*" (the Kriol means '(s)he left his/her brisket'), in both Ngalakgan and Kriol. Such names may be direct translations — a calque — of the name in a previous language. For example, the Gaelic name *Cearamh Meadhonach* has an English version: *Middlequarter*, a direct calque from the earlier Gaelic (Nicolaisen 1976:54).

Better evidence for long-term residency, as Harvey (1999) again notes, comes from names that contain language-specific morphological patterns, but which are not entirely susceptible to analysis by speakers, like the English placename *Chilton* for instance. The ending *-ton* is commonly associated with English placenames, but the derivation of *chil-* is not obvious to the average person.

In the area around Roper Bar, for instance, there are several names that contain either the feminine possessive suffix *-ngoji* or the locative suffix *-kgah*, attached to stems that are not recognisable; two are shown in (8).¹⁶

- (8) a. *Nana-ngoji* ?-hers
- b. *Bunditj-gah* ?-LOC

The Morphys (1981) record a placename *Nanangoji* which seems to contain the same feminine suffix *-ngoji*, but the stem *nana* to which it is attached is unknown.¹⁷ Similarly, the name *Bunditjgah* appears to contain the locative suffix *-kgah* ~ *-gah*. The name refers to a place in the Roper River where a firestick was left in the water in the Dreamtime. The water here churns at low tide and is said to 'boil' from the action of the dreaming firestick. But the stem *bunditj* is not used in Ngalakgan for 'firestick' or 'fire', indeed it has no meaning. Notably, the word cannot be found in any of the surrounding languages (Alawa, Mangarrayi, Marra) either. Therefore, names such as *Bunditjgah* and *Nanangoji* indicate that speakers of Ngalakgan have been using these names for long enough so that their original linguistic meaning has been lost. Now, they are placenames like *Chilton*, *Petersham* which are partly recognisable (because of the elements *-ton*, *-ham* ≈ *-gah*, *-ngoji*) but whose meaning cannot now be reconstructed by speakers.¹⁸

Like the partly opaque names in Ngalakgan, many names in the St Vidgeon's area contain what look like Alawa nominal morphology, but which are not regular or transparent in the modern language.

¹⁶ A selection of unanalysable placenames is provided in Map 2. Again, this map should be treated with caution. Sources: Northern Land Council, Morphy and Morphy (1981), own fieldwork.

¹⁷ This name is unlikely to derive from a single morpheme, since the vowel /o/ in Ngalakgan has a highly restricted distribution. With two exceptions in the lexicon (one onomatopoeic term and one recent borrowing), /o/ never occurs in medial syllables unless it also occurs in edge-most syllables in a word (see Baker 1999:72).

¹⁸ §6.1 provides evidence that names like *Bunditjgah* contain elements that are still meaningful to speakers.

- (9) a. *Walgalirr* cf. Alwa: *gelerr* 'skull'
 b. *Walngirr* ?Alwa: *ngirr* 'red'
 c. *Wulbulirr* cf. Marra *bulabula* 'shoulder blade' + Alwa *-irr* LOC
 d. *Yumanji* Al. *yumarr* 'good'; locative form should be *yumanda*

I omit a full discussion of these names. The only placename in this set that was translated by informants was (9d): *Yumanji*. This name was translated as the 'good place', presumably because of the Alawa word *yumarr* 'good'. However, the placename does not have the predicted form for *yumarr*+LOC, that would be *yumanda*. Instead, it has the locative allomorph associated with stems ending in a stop or nasal, e.g. **yumany*, **yuman*, or a semivowel [j]: **yumay*. The name is therefore irregular. It is unclear what speakers' translation of the name signifies, whether it should be regarded as folk etymology, or whether it represents a continuation of the meaning of an archaic and/or irregular form.¹⁹

The name for the Wilton/Roper junction is *Wararri* or *Wararrirr* (the former is that used by Ngalakgan speakers, the latter by Alawa speakers).²⁰ The junction is rocky and creates eddies in the water. The name was not translated by speakers, but there are some tantalising possibilities. It resembles both Alawa *wari-rrri* (hole-LOC) 'at the hole' and the Alawa non-finite 'coverb' *warirr* 'churn up, disturb water'. The vocalism difference in either case is unexplained. One further possibility is that the name derives from a reduplicated form of the related Marra noun *warirr* 'agitated or bubbling water' on the Marra pattern: *war-*'*arirr* 'many eddies', with perhaps dissimilation of the consonants *r* [ɹ] and *rr* [r].

3 INFLECTED VERBS AND CLAUSES AS PLACENAMES

Many names of the Roper contain verbal morphology. As we have seen with the nominal forms, some of these are transparent to speakers, but many are not. There are also a number of names that are suggestive of earlier language forms in the area.

3.1 Verbs as placenames in the Ngalakgan area

The Ngalakgan area immediately surrounding the Roper Bar and nearby communities on the river has several placenames which can be identified with verbs or clauses. In Ngalakgan, Alawa, and Marra, an inflected verb can take the place of a clause. The verb is prefixed with pronominal elements that indicate the grammatical person, noun class and number of the subject and object or indirect object. The verb is suffixed for tense/aspect/mood. In Ngalakgan, as in many languages of this region, verbs often consist of two parts: one of a small class of directly inflecting root verbs — the 'finite verb' — which bear the tense

¹⁹ Given the tendency for Alawa to underdetermine syllable final [ɹ] and [ɹ] (see the next footnote), and the areal pattern of alternations among approximants [ɹ] and [j], the hypothesis that *yumay* represents an older form of the word cannot be discounted.

²⁰ This name seems to have a variable form, which makes it difficult to determine the quality of the consonants involved. Sharpe (1972:15, 18) notes the difficulty in distinguishing [ɹ] from [ɹ], [l] from [r] and [j] from [ɹ] in Alawa, particularly in syllable-final position. I have had the same experience in working with Alawa speakers. The ending *-irr* which is very common in placenames of this area (being one allomorph of the Alawa locative suffix) varies between tap and (alveolar) approximant articulation.

inflection (like auxiliary verbs such as ‘do’, ‘will’, ‘can’ in English), and one of an open class of non-finite ‘coverbs’, which carry the weight of the semantic meaning. Many of the verbal placenames in this region have this kind of form. Some examples are presented in (10).

- (10) a. *Wandarrganiny* (Morphy & Morphy 1981) cf. *ganiny* ‘take’+PC
 b. *Yinbirryunginy* cf. *yony*, *yongoniny* ‘lie’+PP, PC
 c. *Jilmiyunginy* or *yenginy* ‘put’+PC
 d. *Burrrhburrrminygah*
burrrhburrr-mi+ny-gah
 ‘clap.hands’-do+PP-LOC
 ‘where [they] sang corroboree’ (lit. ‘where they clapped hands’)
 e. *Jarrburdetjbutjjinygah*
jarr-burru-detj+bu+tjj+iny-gah
 ?leg-3PL-?cross+[hit+]RR+PC-LOC
 ‘where [they] crossed their legs’
 f. *Julyurrrhminygah*
julyurrrh-mi+ny-gah
 ??-do+PC-LOC
 ‘where they *x*-ed?’
 g. *Berrhberrminygah*
berrhberr-mi+ny-gah
 ?step-do+PC-LOC
 ‘where [they: wallabies] stepped’
 h. *Baltjjardatbutjjinygah*
baltjjardat-bu+tjj+iny-gah
 ??-[hit+]PC-LOC
 ‘where [they]*x*-ed’

As with the nominal examples in §2, we again find both completely analysable forms and those which are more or less obscure in part. One name that is identical to a modern Ngalakgan verb is (10d) *Burrrhburrrminygah*. When I recorded this name from an informant as part of his recitation of the Plains Kangaroo dreaming track he translated it with both the gesture of tapping clap sticks together, and, in Kriol, as *thei bin kilim fingga* (‘they hit their hands together’, i.e. clapped).

Other placenames are obscure while showing what appears to be Ngalakgan verbal morphology. Example (10f) *Julyurrrhminygah* ends in the same sequence *-minygah* as *Burrrhburrrminygah*, but the meaning of *julyurrrh* is not known to speakers.²¹ Similarly (10a) *Wandarrganiny* (recorded by the Morphys) ends in the Ngalakgan form of the verb ‘to take’ in Past Continuous tense. This verb is also used as a causative. The meaning of *wandarr* is again unknown. The verb inflectional endings *-niny*, *-nginy* are highly distinctive of Gunwinyguan languages (Alpher, Evans, Harvey to appear). Alawa and Marra have no inflecting verbs that end in this kind of suffix.

²¹ The Ngalakgan auxiliary root *-mi+* is the commonest inflected verb in the language; over half the recorded verbs take this root as an auxiliary.

The name *Jarrburdetjbutjjinygah* was translated with the meaning given here by informants.²² The form of this name is a good indication of its age. The word for 'thigh', 'upper leg' in modern Ngalakgan is *jarrpbitj*, not *jarr*. However, *jarr*, or some variant of it, is the word for 'thigh' common to other Gunwinyguan languages, such as Jawoyn to the north-west.²³ The name may therefore preserve an older form of this word. Names such as those in (10), then, indicate a considerable length of time for Ngalakgan speakers in the area between the Hodgson River and the western edge of Eagle Bluff. That is, the traditional 'border' between Ngalakgan and Alawa appears to be confirmed by the evidence of placename etymology.

3.2 Verbs as placenames in the Alawa, Marra and Yukgul area

In this section I examine transparent examples of phrasal placenames incorporating verb morphology, in the southern Roper. I also speculate on the etymology of some names that are not currently translatable by speakers, but which bear some tantalising similarities to the form of Marra and Alawa placenames, suggesting names derived from earlier forms in these languages, or else from another related language.

A large number of placenames in the eastern and south-eastern area of the St Vidgeon's claim area contain an ending *wawurlu* or *wawulu*, which in Marra means 'he/she/it sits', and refer to an ongoing physical manifestation of the ancestors.²⁴ (As in other Australian languages, Marra lacks a copula and uses stance verbs to indicate existence, therefore, the names mean something like 'he/she/it is located'.) That their presence is continuing is overtly indicated by the present tense of the verb. (Note that this is in contrast to Ngalakgan-derived names, which, if they include verbal morphology, are always in past tense.) In some cases, the word or stem to which *wawurlu* is affixed can be found in Marra, in other cases not. This again indicates some depth of age for these names. The examples in (11) are those that are, or probably are, combinations of a noun together with *wawurlu* 'sits' of which it is the subject. The translations given here are those supplied by informants.

(11)	a.	<i>Yirriga wawurlu</i>	? <i>yirriga</i> , but cf. Wndg <i>yirrwa</i> - 'sister'
	b.	<i>Yulbaranyi wawurlu</i>	? <i>yulbaranyi</i>
	c.	<i>Ginggarra wawurlu</i>	(on Limmen river) poss. <i>ginggirra</i> 'wild rice'
	d.	<i>Jagurl wawurlu</i>	<i>jagurl</i> 'testicles'
	e.	<i>Mirnijar wawurlu</i>	<i>mirnijar</i> 'salt'
	f.	<i>Wardanggurr wawurlu</i>	? <i>wardanggurr</i>
	g.	<i>Wujula wawurlu</i>	Mrra <i>wujula</i> 'ordinary woomera'

²² I have been unable to confirm the location to which this name refers. Its position on Map 2 is my guess based on the evidence of dreaming track recounts. However, it appears in two dreaming tracks, and one of these would place this location around 'North Head', south of *Wandarrganiny* on Map 2.

²³ In this respect, Ngalakgan agrees with Ngandi and Nunggubuyu, which have /t̪arppic/, /l̪arpic/ respectively. The correspondence Ngkn /c/ : Ngdi /t̪/ : Ngby /l̪/ word-initially is regular. The Rmba form *darrama*- may also reflect **jarr* (correspondence between PGN **j* and Rmba, Myli, Dln *d* is regular: Harvey (to appear)).

²⁴ In these names, *wawurlu* always takes a stress on the first syllable, regardless of the length of the preceding word or stem, and hence retains some independence.

h.	<i>Jangguyala wawurlu</i>	Mrra <i>jangguyarla</i> ‘lilyseed damper’
i.	<i>Maranggarlba wawurlu</i>	Mrra, Ngkn <i>maranggarlba</i> ‘green tree snake’
j.	<i>Guduwaru wawurlu</i>	cf. Alwa <i>gudaru</i> ‘stone’
k.	<i>Narrwar wawurlu</i>	? <i>narrwar</i>

Example (11j) preserves an older form of the word *gudaru* ‘stone, rock, hill’ which occurs in Alawa, but is obsolete in Marra (Marra informants knew the older form, however).

There is also one example of the stance verb *wajurlu* ‘stands’, given in (12). The name refers to a billabong just north of the Old St Vidgeon’s stationhouse, in the heart of what was formerly Yukgul territory. Informants claimed that the word *jalbalbay* referred to the female genitals.²⁵ Note that the word *jalbalbay* has the form of a Mangarrayi-Alawa-style reduplication of **jalbay*. This kind of reduplication is unknown in Marra, and rare in Alawa. Therefore, the existence of this highly distinctive type of reduplication together with an inflected Marra verb suggests that the language from which this name derives also had this type of reduplicative pattern.

- (12) *Jalbalbay* *wa-ju+rlu* ‘genitals stand’
 ‘genitals’ NP-stand+PR

Other placenames in the Marra-speaking area take the form of transitive clauses, where a noun realises the object, and the subject is expressed only in the pronominal agreement marking on the verb. Some of these examples are presented in (13).

- (13) a. *Warrirdila wayi-wuyi* ‘(s)he abandoned a hook boomerang’
 warrirdila *wayi=wu-yi*
 hook.boomerang abandon=3sg-AUX+PP
- b. *Warurrgu yib-ganyi* ‘(s)he hid a nulla nulla’
 warurrgu *yib=g-anyi*
 nullanulla hide=3sg-AUX+PP
- c. *Mindiwaba gub-ga-wu+rlu* (Mrra)/*Mindiwaba dad-gawurlu* (Wndg)
 baler.shell=??-NP-sit+PR

Example (13c) is worth discussing (see also Heath 1981:317). This place (in the sea off the coast from the Cox River Land Trust) was translated by claimants as ‘where he turns belly down’ in Marra. It is said to have both a Marra and a Warndarrang version. In fact, neither verb *gub* nor *dad* is recorded in either language with this meaning, and *wawurlu* ~ *gawurlu* is not a recorded auxiliary form in Warndarrang.²⁶ The form *mindiwaba* is ‘baler shell’ in both languages.

²⁵ This word cannot be found in Heath’s (1981) dictionary of Marra. The word recorded for ‘vulva’ is similar: *jarlbarr*. And compare the **y:rr* correspondence noted above between *Yumanji*, implying a stem **yumay*, and modern Alawa *yumarr* ‘good’.

²⁶ Alternation between glide-initial and stop-initial forms of prefixes and auxiliaries is regular in Warndarrang and Marra. Glide-initial forms are found after continuants (liquids and glides) and stop-initial forms are found after nasal and oral stops.

- (14) *Wurr-ngumbarnarra* *ngarl-ngarl=warri-yi+rlana*
 3DU-brothers.in.law.DYAD RED-speak=3DU-AUX.PP+RR
 'two brothers-in-law spoke to each other'

Example (14) is another placename from the Cox River area; it has the translation given in Marra (cf. Heath 1981:316). It can also be referred to by the shorter forms *Wurrngumbarnarra* and the anomalous *Wurrngungbarnarra*. In addition, claimants also gave the form *wurr-ngungbarnarra ngarl-ngarl=warlijinji*, claiming this was a Warndarrang version. This does not appear to fit with the description of Warndarrang we have in Heath (1980) however. The nominal class/case prefix for dual in Warndarrang is not *wurr-*, but *yirri-*. The dyadic kin stem *ngumbarnarra* ~ *ngungbarnarra* does not occur in Heath's grammar, though it may be unrecorded. The non-finite coverb *ngarl* meaning 'speak' does occur in Warndarrang, and takes the auxiliary *-ja-* 'to tell'. The form we would expect in this case would be *ngarl=wad-ja-yi*. Heath (1980:83) records *-ji-* as an archaic form of the Warndarrang reciprocal.

The name therefore cannot be derived from the descriptions we have of these languages. If the name derives from a Yukgul source, then Yukgul appears to have had a reciprocal suffix inflection more like Warndarrang (or Nunggubuyu) than Marra.²⁷

- (15) *Wudbud=bala-nji(n)ji* 'they were leaning'
 RED-lean=3pl-stand(DUR)+PP

This placename (15) seems to preserve what looks like a similar ending to (14) *ngarl-ngarl=warlijinji*. This place is south of Old St Vidgeon's, and again is probably in the Yukgul/Alawa/Marra border country. It is said to be the place where the mermaids were chased by mosquitoes. The portion *wudbud* is what we would predict for the reduplication of a coverb root *wud* in Warndarrang or Marra. In Alawa, the verb *wud=neni* means '(he) rests', in Marra the apparently related form is *wud=jinji* meaning 'to lean against'. The form *wudbud=bala-ji+nji* is Marra for 'they were leaning (or: they rested)'. The placename itself is subtly different, having *n* (i.e. [ɲ]) between the prefix *bala-* and the auxiliary *-ji(n)ji*. There is no explanation for this [ɲ], it may be an archaic feature (other auxiliaries, such as *-mburlmarli* 'do this', begin in clusters). The name was also recorded as *Wudwudbalanjiji* (Heath (1981:53) notes a nasal cluster dissimilation rule operating in certain inflected verbs in Marra).

- (16) *Āwarabankawinjin~winygin/Nàwarabanggarinygin*
?awaran bang=ga-gu-?
 lightning split=NP-3SG-
 '[where] lightning split [it]'

This name was recorded in several variants. It refers to a place where Lightning dreaming struck the rock at a ridge south of the Roper, the place is visible from Ngukurr store: again in traditional Yukgul country. The word for lightning in Alawa is *awaran*. The name as a whole looks like the kind of name we have seen so far: Noun+Coverb+Prefix(es)+Auxiliary. It is possible that the name includes a form related to the Marra verb stem *bang* 'split s/thing': so the name would mean something like 'lightning split it (i.e. rock)'. The *ga-* is possibly the Marra Non-Past prefix (which precedes third person *wu-* ~ *gu-*), but the rest of the auxiliary is

²⁷ Analysis is further complicated by our limited knowledge of Warndarrang, which became extinct in the 1970s.

not derivable from Marra. Indeed, assuming the auxiliary (if that is what it is) is in the Present tense, as we have found for the other Marra verbal forms examined so far, there are no Marra or Warndarrang inflected verbal auxiliaries that end in a nasal. Therefore, if the name is from Yukgul, and it represents a structure ending in an inflected auxiliary, then the inflectional system of Yukgul was quite distinct from both Marra and Warndarrang.

4 DISTINCTIVE ENDINGS FOR PLACENAMES

Two recurrent endings are found on placenames in the Ngalakgan area which cannot be derived from any current morphemes in the language. These prove interesting for the internal reconstruction of the Gunwinyguan family. One of these endings is *-boy*, found on a number of placenames in the area of the Roper River, as well as places further to the north-west, such as *Maranboy* (south-east of Katherine on the Central Arnhem highway).

- (17) a. *Larriboy* (Morphy & Morphy 1981)
 b. *Ngurruboy* Roper *ngurru* 'lesser salmon catfish'
 c. *Martboy* ? Ngkn *mardu* 'coolamon'
 d. *Waluboy* ? Roper *bala* ~ *wala* 'side; bank'
 e. *Jalboy* ? cf. Jwyn *jarr* 'thigh', Ngkn *jarrpbitj*; or Ngkn *jala* 'mouth'

Both *Larriboy* and *Ngurruboy* are just west of Bardawarrkga, near a Ngalakgan-speaking clan centre on the Roper River. *Jalboy* is currently applied to one of the tributaries of the Roper, on the western edge of Ngalakgan-speaking territory. *Waluboy* is in the vicinity of Roper Bar. The location of *Martboy* is obscure.

Only a couple of these names have a plausible analysis. Most are opaque to Ngalakgan speakers, with the exception of *Ngurruboy*, which was said by claimants to refer to where the Catfish ancestor (*Ngurru*) crossed the Roper. The element *-boy*, which forms the ending of these words, is mysterious: in none of the nearby languages do we find a potential source for this element. For instance, *-boy* does not look like the locative suffixes of any of the local languages.

One possibility deserves some attention here. That is that *-boy* in placenames preserves some kind of lative 'across, around, along' or Associative/Comitative 'having, with' element. The nearest morphological analogy comes from Jawoyn, which has an adverbial prefix or bound stem *boy-* with a number of senses, one of which is 'transitivity and motion across, especially perlocative and transfer via another party' (Merlan 1989b): *nga-boy-bim-bunay* 'I painted it right across'; *wal-boy-bi-jungay* 'I told you sg. via/across (someone)'.²⁸ Ngalakgan and Rembarnga have (per)lative suffixes *-wi*, *-wə* respectively. Ngandi has *-pbitj* ~ *-bitj*, and Nunggubuyu *-baj* ~ *-waj*.

²⁸ A correspondence between a suffix in one language and a prefix in another language is not unheard of in Gunwinyguan: cf. the Ngkn, Rmba nominal instrumental/comitative suffix *-yih*. In Mayali, this suffix is specialised to Instrumental and Propriative functions in nouns in some dialects and is absent in others (Evans 2000:211), but is found as a productive Comitative prefix on verbs. Presumably, nouns inflected with this suffix were incorporated into the Mayali verb, and the suffix was retained as a comitative marker. This prefix is not used in Ngkn and Rmba, rather the comitative prefix *bartda-* (which co-occurs with *-yih* on nouns: *bartda-birn-yih* 'with/having money') is used as the verbal comitative. Presumably something similar could have occurred in Jawoyn at an early stage.

Internal analysis in these languages indicates an original form of the lative suffix for these languages like **-bay* or **-boy*, which was retained as **-boy* in Jawoyn, but underwent various changes in the other southern Gunwinyguan languages. The form *-boy* in these placenames then presumably represents an archaic form which became the modern forms *-baj*, *-bitj*, and *-wi*; synchronically the original form is preserved intact only in Jawoyn and Warray (Harvey pers. comm.).²⁹

Heath (1984:207) characterises the Nunggubuyu Pergressive *-baj* ~ *-waj* as defining 'a zone or field in which or through which some entity is located or in motion'. An element having this kind of interpretation seems like a highly plausible candidate for the derivation of placenames. The name *Ngurruboy* would then mean '[place] where Catfish (*Ngurru*) passed through or is located', again with a headless relative interpretation. It is interesting that the Jawoyn prefix preserves what may be the original form of the suffix in Rembarnga, Ngalakgan and Ngandi.³⁰

The placename *Jalboy* has been extended to the modern (European) name of one of the western tributaries of the Roper: 'Jalboi Creek'. The initial element *jal* is possibly a form of the same stem *jarr* 'thigh' that we find in other names such as *Jarrburdetjbutjjinygah*, as well as (18a) below.³¹

- (18) a. *Jarrmunu* cf. Jwyn *jarr* 'thigh'
 b. *Weyamunu* cf. Ngkn *weya* 'shade'

The element *-munu* is, like *-boy*, unknown in Ngalakgan. In Jawoyn there is a proprietive ('having') suffix *-muna*. Proprietary suffixes, like latives/pergressives, are plausible endings for placenames, and presumably have a similar force to the Dative pronominals used on Ngalakgan names such as *Berre-ngoji-kгах* 'her brisket'. Hence, (18a) *Jarrmunu* would mean 'having a thigh', and (18b) *Weyamunu* 'having shade', though the vocalism difference between Jawoyn *-muna* and the ending *-munu* is unexplained. In modern Ngalakgan, the proprietive is expressed analytically, with the Comitative prefix *bartda-* and the Instrumental/Ergative suffix *-yih*. One or both of these elements are found over a wide area including Ngandi, Rembarnga, Mayali and Dalabon, perhaps suggesting a recent diffusion of this morphology. It is noteworthy that the suffix *-muna* is rare in Jawoyn according to Merlan (1989b).

²⁹ There are other correspondences Ngdi, Ngby final /c/: Ngkn, Rmba /y/ or /ʔ/ which make this story more plausible.

Ngalakgan	Ngandi	Nunggubuyu	
<i>ngey</i>	<i>ngitj-</i>	<i>mitj-</i>	'name'
<i>-hwi</i>	<i>-hwiŋ</i>	<i>-watj</i>	pronominal emphatic
<i>-(k) gah</i> ALL/LOC	<i>-gitj</i> ALL	<i>-watj</i> ~ <i>-gatj</i>	PERL
<i>-bugih</i>	<i>-bugih</i>	<i>-wugitj</i>	clitic 'just, only'

³⁰ This seems to be a common characteristic of prefixal stems in Gunwinyguan, since some prefixal or initial bound stems preserve archaic morphemes no longer used independently. Besides the Myli comitative prefix *yi(h)-* mentioned above, the Ngdi form *ngitj-* 'name' occurs only as a bound stem in verbs and compound nouns. In Ngalakgan the cognate *ngey* can occur both independently and in compounds.

³¹ I have no explanation for why the liquid coda should be *l* in *Jalboy* but *rr* everywhere else. The other possibility is that it is related to the common Gunwinyguan term for 'mouth': *jala* in Ngalakgan.

5 OVERLAPPING RANGES

Around half to perhaps two-thirds of the placenames in the Ngalakgan-speaking territory have no derivation in any language, a figure comparable with those reported elsewhere (e.g. Sutton, this volume).³² A number of these names have what look like Alawa or Marra or Yukgul derivations, including the tell-tale Alawa locative suffix allomorphy, as well as phonotactic patterns not found in Ngalakgan. The question these names raise is, does Ngalakgan represent a recent arrival in this area? This is a pertinent question given the extensive range of Gunwinyguan languages throughout Arnhem Land, and the large number of Ngalakgan placenames that are transparent. What we find, however, is that although many names in the Ngalakgan area appear to have Alawic or Marran features, *none* of them are synchronically derivable from either of these languages with any degree of certainty.

5.1 Phonological and phonotactic patterns

It has been noted by Harvey (1999:162) that phonological patterns are of little use in determining placename–language associations, since the majority of Australian languages have very similar phonological systems. There are just a few features that distinguish the various languages of the claim; these are set out in (19).

- (19) a. **Vowel inventories.** Ngalakgan and neighbouring Mangarrayi and Ngandi have a five-vowel system /a, e, i, o, u/. Alawa has a four-vowel system: /a, e, i, u/, with restrictions on the distribution of /e/. Marra and Warndarrang have a three-vowel system: /a, i, u/.
- b. **Consonant inventories.** Ngalakgan, Ngandi and Mangarrayi contrast five supralaryngeal places of articulation in stops and nasals, and two in laterals. These languages also have a phonemic glottal stop. Alawa, Marra and Warndarrang contrast stops and nasals at the same five places, except that Alawa in addition contrasts a palatal lateral (Sharpe 1972:18 notes this is rare). Ngalakgan and Ngandi contrast simple (short) from geminate (long) stops. Mangarrayi, Alawa, Marra and Warndarrang lack such a contrast. Sharpe (1972) proposes that Alawa formerly had a contrast between simple and pre-nasalised stops however. (Initial nasal+stop clusters are also found in Marra and Warndarrang, but it is not clear that these are pre-nasalised stops.)
- c. **Phonotactics.** Ngalakgan disallows clusters of liquid plus alveolar stop within roots, and such clusters are rare inter-morphemically also. Alawa and Marra allow such clusters both root-internally and inter-morphemically. All languages allow a wide range of word- and morpheme-final consonants and clusters.

All three kinds of patterns could potentially distinguish the origin of placenames in this area. The problem is again that speakers translate between phonological systems with ease. One example is the placename *Narakgarani* (no derivation), a site on the bank of the Roper River

³² For example, on the land claim map of Morphy and Morphy (1981) there are 51 names in an area approximately 540 km² (i.e. roughly the area shown in Map 2). Of these, just 11 have a regular translation (from Ngalakgan) of which we can be confident. None of the other names has any regular translation in any other language.

downstream from the Roper–Wilton junction. This name has a long stop for Ngalakgan speakers (symbolised with the digraph ‘kg’): [nà.ɪakka.ɪáni]. But for speakers of Marra, as well as for Ngalakgan people who are not speakers of Ngalakgan, the name is pronounced [nà.ɪaqa.ɪáni], where the Ngalakgan geminate stop is equivalent to a simple stop in Marra.³³

One form which could prove useful is the name *Rono*. This is a place several kilometres north-east of Urupunga community, probably on the earlier border with Yukgul. The name has two /o/ vowels which we have noted are not found as phonemes in Alawa, Warndarrang or Marra. Hence, the form of the name would tend to support its origin in a language such as Ngalakgan. However, this name has no derivation in Ngalakgan.

The fact that the name has two instances of /o/ does not necessarily provide good evidence for its origin however. Sharpe (1972:19) notes that in Alawa both /a/ and /u/ are realised with low back allophones ([ɔ] and [o] respectively) in certain environments. Sharpe's statement is as follows:

(20)	/a/	[ɔ]	occurs infrequently fluctuating with [a] following velar consonants, and between retroflex consonants (including [ɭ]).
	/u/	[o]	only occurs contiguous to a liquid, alveolar semivowel [ɭ], or palatal, or in one syllable closed syllable words.

It is possible, then, that [ɔno] is the phonetic realisation of an earlier form */ruwunu/ or */runu/. Other placenames from the Ngalakgan area are realised with variable vocalic quality depending on the speaker. Examples are given in (21).

- (21) a. Golotdoh [gólɔttoʔ] (Spring behind Mount McMinn)
b. Gorongah [gɔ́.ɽŋaʔ] (Spring north of Urupunga)

Marra speakers pronounce these two placenames as [gɒlɒdʊ], [gɒɹɒŋa], respectively. Speakers appear to translate foreign phonological contrasts into their own inventory. The existence of a phonological contrast in a placename is no guarantee that the placename derives from a language that maintains that contrast in its lexicon. All three of these names with the vowel /o/ could have derived from names like the Marra forms given, since in each case the phonological environment in the name is one that is conducive to realising /u/ as [o].

As Harvey (1999:165) finds, distinctive phonotactic patterns are potentially more useful in determining placename derivation than are phonological contrasts. An example of this from the Roper is the placename *Yirriwurlwurldi*. This place is at the mouth of the Roper, where the water is disturbed and forms whirlpools. The phonotactics of this placename — with an [ld] cluster — constitute negative evidence that it is unlikely to derive from a language such as Ngalakgan or Ngandi, both of which disallow clusters of liquid plus alveolar stop intramorphemically. The form of this name also suggests that *-di* is a suffix, since reduplication in Warndarrang and Marra targets a disyllabic portion of the base, unless the base is monosyllabic.³⁴ Neither Ngalakgan nor Ngandi has a suffix of this form. Therefore, an

³³ Alawa speakers tend to have long and voiceless stops, at least in some positions in some words, very similar to geminates in Ngalakgan. This may be a reflection of the stop contrast which Sharpe claims existed formerly in the language.

³⁴ As we have seen in Table (2), *-dV* is a characteristic locative ending for nouns in Alawa, where the stem ends in *-rV* or *-V*. However, in Alawa this allomorph of the locative copies the final vowel of the stem: **Yirriwurlwurldu* is the expected form.

origin in a language like Warndarrang or Marra, which allows such clusters, is indicated in this case.

There are several names in what is now regarded as the territory of Ngalakgan-speaking clans which have phonotactic patterns foreign to Ngalakgan. One placename recorded by the Morphys (1981) as *Balayarrurru*, just to the south-west, has a phonotactic pattern that is extremely rare in Ngalakgan but quite common in Alawa. Ngalakgan disprefers sequences of liquids, especially sequences of the tap [ɾ] or glide [ɹ]. Sequences such as **yarrurru* do not occur in Ngalakgan.³⁵ Such sequences are well represented in Alawa, however, which has forms like *gurrurreru* ‘dingo; wild dog’.

5.2 Foreign morphology

The placenames in (22) have the general appearance of being derived from Alawa, Marra or a related language. All of them are on the south-eastern borders of the territory generally accepted as Ngalakgan.

(22)	a.	<i>Wirlbirlbarri</i>		Knuckey Bluff near Urapunga
	b.	<i>Yurlhbunji</i>		Old Roper Bar police station area
	c.	<i>Walanji(wurr)</i>		‘Alligator Bluff’
	d.	<i>Yurende</i>		A swamp east of the Wilton–Roper junction
	e.	<i>Wararrirr</i>		Wilton–Roper junction
	f.	<i>Nabòrdopburláni</i>		A creek east of the Roper Bar airstrip
	g.	<i>Náwarnbarnkúlyi ~ Wàrnbarnkúlyi</i>		Roper Bar airstrip
	h.	<i>Ngalardarra</i> archer.fish	<i>bìn=gu-línma</i> ??=3sg-CAUS+PP ~ <i>Warrba binggurlimba</i>	Tidal limit of Hodgson River
	i.	<i>Nàbarlmántji</i>		‘Pine Bluff’
	j.	<i>Wànkarnangínji</i>		Spot on Hodgson River west of Castle Hill
	k.	<i>Riwanji</i>		Swamp near Queensland Crossing

One of these placenames — *Walanji* (22c) — has three variants: *Walji*, *Walanji* and *Walanjiwurr*; the last with an ending *-wurr*. This ending would appear to be a suffix of some kind, since we have observed optional suffixes in examples like *Mirnitjja-ngoji-(kgah)* ‘where her shade trees are’. However, none of the extant languages of this area preserves a suffix of exactly this form. Marra has an allative/locative suffix *-yu(rr)* ~ *-nyu(rr)*. The Alawa allative case is similar, but like the locative discussed earlier it takes a range of allomorphs, depending on the final syllable of the stem. One allomorph ends in *-(n)dVwurr*, that for stems ending in a

³⁵ In a database of 1,268 Ngalakgan roots, only 10 such roots occur with an identical sequence of liquids. In every case, roots were of the form CV₁LV₁LV₁, where every vowel was the same, e.g. *mululuk* ‘conkerberry (‘dog’s balls’)’.

liquid or retroflex glide. The allomorph for stems ending in a palatal nasal (which would be the predicted form if the stem is **walany*) is *-njirru*.

My consultant commented on placename (22a) thus: '*thet Wankarnangintji thet kro bin ibap*' ('*Wankarnangintji* is where that crow heaped up', or possibly 'heaved up').³⁶ This name appears to be a combination of one Marra term for 'crow' *wanggarnangin*, with Alawa locative suffix allomorph *-ji*. (Possibly my rendition of the name is a mistranscription of the first nasal-stop cluster). *Wankarnangintji*, *Yurllhbunji* and *Walanji* all end in the sequence [ɲʃi], which as we have seen is a locative allomorph in Alawa for words ending in *-y*, or a nasal or oral stop. None of these names can be derived from Alawa however. *Yurende* is possibly *yuruwerr*+LOC 'bowerbird place' (*yuruwende* would be the regular outcome, and *jurerr* is an alternative term for bowerbird which also occurs in Ngalakgan); as far as I know there are no bowerbird associations with this place.

Therefore, in the territory now associated with the Ngalakgan language we find names, such as *Bolkgotj-ngoji-kga*, which are transparent in the language, as well as names which are probably derived from some other language similar to Marra or Alawa. Taken together, these facts would tend to indicate a recent origin in this area for Ngalakgan. This idea is even more attractive given that Ngalakgan is so closely related to Rembarrnga, which is spoken a long way to the north. Nevertheless, names such as *Jarrburdetjbutjjinygah* and *Wandarrganiny* indicate a considerable length of time for Ngalakgan speakers between the Wilton and Hodgson rivers, and the western edge of Eagle Bluff, south of the Roper River, since they contain morphology that is distinctively Ngalakgan, yet they cannot be derived regularly from the language. In addition, *Jarrburdetjbutjjinygah* is the name used by Alawa and Marra speakers also. Therefore it cannot be a recent calque. It is also within this area that we find names, such as *Balalayarrurru* and *Riwanji*, which phonotactic patterns and morphology foreign to Ngalakgan. That is, within the same local area, we find names seemingly from a range of different linguistic strata. Indeed, many names (perhaps around a half to two-thirds) in the Ngalakgan area have no clear derivation in any language. It is notable that, of the names in the Ngalakgan area that look like Alawa, *none* is in fact transparent synchronically.

Such patterns are common elsewhere in the world. In Scotland for example, we find Northumbrian English names such as *Eldbotle* and *Morebattle* (<OE *eld* 'old' and *mere* 'lake' plus *bōðl* 'a dwelling') (Nicolaisen 1976:77). We also find many names derived from Scottish Gaelic such as *Baldornoch* (Gael. *baile* 'township' *dornach* 'pebbly') (Nicolaisen 1976:139). In addition, we find names such as *Shiel*, which cannot be easily derived from Germanic or Celtic sources (Nicolaisen 1976:189). The British situation is not strictly comparable however, since small group and linguistic affinities to particular tracts of land appear to be more important and more enduring in Australia. One reflection of this difference is the fact that dreaming myths and placenames sometimes make direct reference to language names, such as the placename *Marra ngarl-ngarl-n-amban* '[where] he started talking Marra'. As Rumsey (1993:200ff) has noted, such myths and placenames set up a cosmological association between land and language with which it is difficult to find analogies in the European context.³⁷

³⁶ I am not sure what 'heave up'/'heap up' refers to here.

³⁷ Of course, there is commonly in the UK a deeply-felt connection between localities and dialect variants. So the difference is one of degree perhaps.

Having discussed the morphological patterns and derivation of a range of placenames in the Roper area, in the final section I address the issue of how these names are used by speakers.

6 THE LINGUISTIC USE OF PLACENAMES

In this section I discuss the interaction of placenames with the morphology of the languages, as well as their extension in the actual world.

6.1 Grammatical status

The status of placenames in the language — as transparent or opaque forms — is reflected in the way they are used by speakers. The placename *Mirnitjja-ngoji-kgah*, for instance, can also be referred to as *Mirnitjja-ngoji* ‘her shade tree’, or simply *Mirnitjja*. Similarly, the place *Dubal* ‘Leichhardt tree’ can also be referred to (with noun class prefixes) as *mu-Dubal*, or *mun-gu-Dubal*, where *mu-* and *mun-gu-* have a function like that of the English articles ‘a’, ‘the’ respectively. If I want to say ‘I’ll meet you at *Dubal*’, then I say ‘*mu-Dubal-kgah*’ ‘at the Leichhardt tree’. Similarly the placename *gu-Mirnitjja-ngoji-kgah* takes the neuter noun class prefix *gu-* appropriate to the term *mirnitjja*.

Names like *Bunditjgah* are quite different. Recall that this name is untranslatable, though it appears to contain the Ngalakgan locative suffix *-kgah* ~ *-gah*. This name can take articles also: *gu-Bunditjgah*. Here, the name takes a neuter class prefix. Neuter class is the noun class associated with topography in general. This name cannot lose the locative suffix *-gah* however, unlike *Mirnitjja-ngoji-kgah* above: *Bunditj* is not an equivalent for *Bunditjgah*. The name *Bunditjgah* is interpreted by speakers in all three of locative, allative and nominative case roles, without any change in the name itself.

The suffix *-kgah* ~ *-gah* has both locative and allative functions, but Ngalakgan also possesses a specific allative suffix *-kgagah* ~ *-gagah* (possibly a frozen reduplication of *-kgah* ~ *-gah*). This case suffix, which is infrequently used, can occur on placenames; Merlan (1983:46) has the example *Warnbarnkulyi-kgagah* (cf. 22g above).

The occurrence of the allative is apparently limited to those placenames which do not already contain the locative suffix as a typical or possible part of the name itself. Informants specifically rejected the form **Bunditjga-gah* [bùndickága?] ‘at/to *Bunditjgah*’ in either of the locative or allative senses.³⁸ Informants also rejected this suffix on **Mirnitjja-ngoji-kgagah* ‘to her *mirnitjja* trees’. At first glance this seems odd, since the name is entirely transparent, and the sequence *mirnitjja-ngoji-kgagah* is otherwise perfectly acceptable in Ngalakgan.

The unacceptability of the allative form fits with Harvey’s (1999) analysis that names with locative suffixes are to be interpreted as headless relative clauses. The locative suffix can derive such headless relative interpretations, but the allative cannot. Although the name could be interpreted as *mirnitjja-ngoji-kgah-gah*, that is, as a LOC/ALL form of a headless relative, such multiple case ‘stacking’ is ruled out in Ngalakgan. The unacceptability of **Bunditjgagah*

³⁸ Stop-initial suffixes, such as *-kgah* ~ *-gah*, in Ngalakgan alternate between geminate and simple stop realisations, depending on the prosodic and segmental structure of the preceding stem. These alternations can be local (as here) or non-local; see Baker (1999, §4.3) for discussion. The process is also found in Ngandi and Rembarnga.

in addition indicates that this name also retains a relative clause interpretation for speakers, even though it is not clear in this case what the clause is.

6.2 Prefixes on names

All of the languages of this area (Mangarrayi, Ngalakgan, Ngandi, Alawa, Marra and Warndarrang) have a series of prefixes for person and/or gender (and, in the case of Mangarrayi, Alawa and Marra, case) which seem to appear on a number of placenames in the two claim areas examined here. Fifty-two, or just over 20 per cent, of attested placenames in the St Vidgeon's area begin in the sequence *na-*, *nga-*, or *nya-*, all three of which are prefix forms in Marra and/or Alawa. Again, while the placenames often have the right morphology and prosody (stress on the stem) to be prefixed words, often the stem cannot be identified with a meaning. I examine a few examples below; discussion follows the example in each case.

(23) *Nya-Márranguru*

This is the name of a place on the south side of the Roper River, south-east of *Wardangaja* lagoon. Once again, the place lies within what was probably Yukgul-speaking country. The name is transparently Marra *nya-marranguru* 'head'. The prefix *nya-* is the oblique form of the neuter prefix in Marra, which normally requires a suffix *-yu(rr)* ~ *-nyu(rr)* in the locative. Heath (1981:92) notes that placenames, exceptionally, are realised with the oblique prefix in a locative sense, without the locative suffix.

The stress in *nya-Márranguru*, falling on the first syllable of the noun stem, is the characteristic stress pattern of nouns with polysyllabic stems in all the languages of the Roper (see Baker 1999). Its retention in the placename indicates that the word is not opaque to speakers: stress is normally initial in unprefixed stems in Marra.

- (24) a. *Nya-Mayigarl* N.OBL-pandanus.nut
 b. *Na-Mala-yurr* M.OBL-cloud-LOC

Example (24a) is an island in the Towns River about 4.5 kilometres downstream from the road crossing. The example (24b) signifies a big swamp. The word is transparently 'at the cloud' (Marra), or else 'at the navel; where the navel is' but in the latter case with anomalous class assignment. Note that for this name the locative suffix is part of the citation form of the placename. Heath (1981:92) further notes that besides names such as *Wiliyurru*, with optional prefix, there are others, such as *Nawarrwarr* (Mount Moore), where the prefix is frozen and cannot be omitted.³⁹ Stress on this name reinforces this analysis: [náwarwar]. However, I previously mentioned (at example 22) the name *Náwarnbarnkúlyi* ~ *Wàrnbarnkúlyi*, which is unanalysable, but which nevertheless also has both prefixed and unprefixed forms (and note that the prefixed form has initial stress). At least for Ngalakgan speakers, these forms are in free variation and do not seem to derive distinct case functions. Indeed, this name can take Ngalakgan prefixes and case-suffixes: *gun-gu-Warnbarnkulyi-kgah* 'at W'. In this case, the Marra prefix is always omitted.

The grammatical structures in which placenames occur confirm what we have found in terms of etymology: placenames have a range of morphological transparency in the languages concerned, from fully analysable to completely opaque. Even where a name is not fully

³⁹ See Heath (1981:91–93) for further discussion of the use of morphology with placenames in Marra.

analysable (*Bunditjgah*, *Nawarnbarnkulyi*), speakers seem to recognise (in some cases) the existence of morphological structure, and treat the names accordingly.

6.3 Referential range

For the placenames of which I have some experience — those around Roper Bar and the area surrounding Bardawarrkga and Urapunga communities — there are primarily two types of names: those that name large-scale regions or topographic features (such as rivers, hills and clan territories), and those that name a specific (usually small) area within such a topographic area, such as a rock waterhole, a deep pool in the river, a stand of tree species, a billabong or the like. Generally, such names have an identifiable range or limit. The name *Yawurlwarda*, which is applied to several billabongs around the Roper, refers to the billabong and the immediately surrounding bank. The reference of the name is bounded by the extent of the topographic feature to which it refers. Similarly *Marrangarh*, the name for the Wilton River, is bounded by the river and its banks.

The places *Yawurlwarda* and *Marrangarh*, being bodies of water, can only have this kind of bounded reference. But terms that refer to objects — trees, rocks, hills, caves — tend to have both a specific localised reference to that feature, and also a more general reference to the surrounding area. Such is the case with the placenames that are tree species names: *Mu-Dubal* (Leichhardt tree), *Mirnitjja* (*Cathormion umbellatum*), and *Motjo* ($\approx$ Coolibah *mutjju*). In each case, the name refers to the specific tree, or stand of trees, that rest at that specific spot. This kind of name seems to encompass as many trees of that species which are found at that place, so in the case of *Mu-Dubal* it is currently one, *Motjo*, also one (dead one), and for *Mirnitjja* it is a grove of *Cathormion* trees. The name also refers to the area around these trees: both *Mu-Dubal* and *Motjo* stand on the bank of the river. At the Roper Bar boat landing called *Jinji*, there used to stand two sacred paperbark trees (*mu-bulpbul*). These have died and fallen down, but others are growing in their place and are referred to in the same way as manifestations of the Plains Kangaroo. This confirms that it is the link between particular species and particular sites which is important to the Ngalakgan, not the actual tree which happens to be the (temporary) embodiment of the ancestor during its lifetime.

7 ROPER PLACENAMES AS UNIQUE IDENTIFIERS

I claimed in the introduction that the major formal difference between the placenames in the Roper and placenames in Britain is the scarcity of topographic terms in the former. In Britain, Nicolaisen (1976) and Gelling (1984) characterise the most common placenames as a compound of a generic and a specific, qualifying or modifying term (Germanic names have the order specific+generic, and Celtic names generic+specific). The generic is a topographic or settlement term such as *mountain*, *hill*, *pool*, *creek*, *town*, *ridge* or their equivalents in other languages such as Gaelic. Transparent examples from the UK are such names as *Black-pool*, *Christ-church*, *Sliabh-sneacht* ('mountain [of] snow'), *Penfro* ('head/end-land'). This kind of naming has been transferred with British settlers in Australia: *Peat's Ridge*, *Roper River*, etc.

There are no names like this in the Roper. I know of no names in the Ngalakgan area that include a topographic term, whether analysable or not. These terms certainly exist in Ngalakgan — *birn* 'rock, hill', *bo* 'river', *langga* 'billabong', *gabogaboh* 'plain, open place',

ruwurr 'ridge' — and are frequently used by speakers to refer to the landscape. They are never found in placenames in combination with modifying terms however.

In the St Vidgeon's area, there are a handful of Alawa placenames that are topographic terms, these are presented in (7) above; e.g. *Ngarrgalirr* 'high ridge, bank'+LOC, and *Leguldu*, meaning 'deep depression'+LOC. Again, there are no names combining generic and modifier terms. Furthermore, the majority of Alawa placenames end in one of the locative allomorphs, implying the same kind of headless relative clause interpretation we find in Ngalakgan.⁴⁰ In that case, *Ngarrgalirr* is not simply 'high bank', but 'where [he/she left] a high bank' or possibly 'where [he/she did something] at the high bank'.

As well as the lack of placenames formed through compounding of topographic terms, in actual use placenames do not co-occur with topographic terms in a phrasal construction either. Speakers never (to my knowledge) say such things as *gun-gu-birn-Walanji* (IV-DEF-rock-[toponym]) 'Walanji Hill' or *gun-gu-langga-Yawurlwarda* 'Yawurlwarda Billabong'. They *do* use such constructions in English and Kriol: *Mabiligalu Plain*, *Walanji Hill*, *Walgundu Billabong*, *Wurrinjal Cave*.⁴¹ The lack of generic+modifier constructions in placenames does not derive from any morphological restrictions in Ngalakgan: generic+modifier compounds are productive and very common, e.g. *langga-ganyah* 'small billabong', *weh-balkginy* 'salty water; beer', *gurndu-mah* 'good country'.

I suggest that the lack of topographic terms, and in particular compounds involving topographic terms, in placenames in the Roper reflects a difference in the basis of naming, and more deeply, of conceptions of place. In the Roper, places that are named constitute the manifest embodiment of the ancestral creator beings. What non-Indigenous people to the area call the 'Hodgson River', the locals think of simultaneously as the track of the Mermaids *gilyirringgilyirri*. The ridge of ground above Roper Bar is not simply a local geological inclination, but is also the point where the Plains Kangaroo mob left themselves as *mutjju*, a coolibah tree which grows there.

It is the fact that topographic features are meaningful in the Roper cosmology which makes sense of the fact that they tend to have names reflecting cosmological events and manifestations. Placenames in the Roper have many of the characteristics of personal names, indeed, most personal names are derived from placenames within the clan territory. In this respect, it makes sense that placenames do not co-occur with generics, since we do not find constructions such as *nu-gu-bigurr-Golokgurndu* (I-DEF-human-[personal name] 'Golokgurndu man') either. That is, the typical Roper placenames cannot be combined with a generic because they are unique identifiers, like personal names. The use of a generic would be redundant, given that the name uniquely identifies its referent.⁴²

⁴⁰ I have been unable to confirm whether Alawa and Marra speakers allow such constructions.

⁴¹ One (Alawa) speaker used such constructions frequently, other speakers never used them.

⁴² There are (rare) cases in which two distinct places share the same name. An instance of this in the Roper is the name *Yawurlwarda*, which is applied to a billabong near Roper Bar, as well as one near Ngukurr, dozens of kilometres away. In a text recounting the Plains Kangaroo myth, the narrator distinguished them with an adjoined clause:

<i>gun-gohje-bugih</i>	<i>gu-langga</i>	<i>gu-gurndu-ngey-bu+n</i>	<i>'Yawurlwarda'</i>
IV-there-just	IV-lagoon	NP-country-name-[hit+] _{PP}	[toponym]

That drimin bin kolim that bilabong 'Yalwarda', lil bilabong.
'That billabong is called "Yawurlwarda".'

<i>langga-ganyah,</i>	<i>nomo</i>	<i>gun-gohje</i>	<i>gu-yenipbi</i>	<i>gun-gu-ngolkgo,</i>
lagoon-small,	NEG	IV-there	IV-whatsit?	IV-DEF-big

CONCLUSION

The discussion has shown that Roper names take a wide variety of forms: bare noun, noun inflected for case/possession/class, inflected verb; many names have an interpretation equivalent to a clause in English. One interesting factor is the large proportion of names (throughout the Roper) that have either no translation, or are not entirely analysable in any of the languages now spoken in the area. I have suggested that in some cases these names point to the presence of earlier languages, such as Yukgul and Warndarrang. In many other cases, these names bear no resemblance to any of the commonly found morphological patterns for toponyms in the area. There remain a significant number of names that are only partially analysable, pointing to a long continuity of occupation for the language groups now found in the Roper.

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onli *gu-langga-ganyah*, *gohje-bugih*

only IV-lagoon-small, there-just

Onli that bilabong lilwan, nomo that bigwan - onli lilwan.

‘It’s a little billabong, not that big one, only that little one.’

This is one instance where we might expect to find a construction such as *Yawurlwarda-ganyah* ‘small Y’, or *Yawurlwarda-ngolkgo* ‘big Y’, but no such examples are attested.

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