1. Introduction

In the Dyirbal language community of north-east Australia there was a convention — nay, a requirement — of being at all times maximally specific. If a snake is referred to, one should say which type of snake — whether the deadly brown snake, bayi walgu, or the black snake, bayi gajamay, or whatever. There is, it is true, a generic term bayi wadam 'snake' but this is only used if the identity cannot be determined; say, if only the shadow of a snake is seen, or just its tail. Everyone in the community was familiar with the various snake species (some highly dangerous, others harmless). Identification should always be made, and be stated.

A verb 'know' is lacking from Dyirbal, simply because it would be too vague. Whereas a speaker of English can say just I know where the money is hidden, in Dyirbal there is a requirement to say how one knows this — perhaps 'My father told me where the money is hidden' or 'I saw the money being hidden'. (There are, however, adjectives meaning 'don't know': ŋañum 'not familiar with a person or place' and juru 'don't know where someone is, never heard a particular story, etc.').

In keeping with the need for precision, there is a set of grammatical markers which accompany nouns and verbs, indicating whether the referent is 'there and visible' (markers commencing with ba-), or 'here and visible' (ya-), or 'not
visible' (ŋa-) — this is an evidentiality system (see §2.3 of Chapter 1). The
chapter explains the meaning and function of the markers, paying particular
attention to the non-visible ŋa- forms. These may describe something only
known from its noise, something which has just passed out of sight but is still
audible, something neither visible or audible, or something remembered from the
past. In addition, spirits are always described with the non-visual marker, even if
they can be seen.

All the examples below are taken from texts (rather than being constructed).
Dyirbal has free ordering of words not only within a clause but also within a
sentence — see (13). It is also highly elliptical. The reader will thus need to be
attentive in studying examples, but this should provide reward through an
understanding of the modus operandi of this wonderful language.

The language has just 16 phonemes - 3 vowels (i, a, u) and 13 consonants.
There is a stop and nasal at each of four places of articulation: bilabial (b, m),
apico-alveolar (d, n), lamino-palatal (j, ñ) and dorso-velar (g, ŋ). Liquids
comprise apico-alveolar lateral l and two rhotics: apico-alveolar trill rr and
apico-postalveolar continuant r. And there are two semi-vowels: lamino-palatal y
and bilabial-velar w.

All roots and words have at least two syllables, except for interjections ŋa
'yes' and ŋu 'alright', and short forms ban, bam, ŋan, ŋam of absolutive noun
markers balan, balam, ŋalan, ŋalam (see §3.1, §3.3). The sign '/' is used in
transcribed texts to separate intonation groups; an utterance could end at any
place marked by '/'.


2. Grammatical background

Dyirbal shows mixed ergative/accusative morphological marking. Nouns, adjectives and noun markers have ergative case suffixes for transitive subject (A) function, and absolutive case, with zero realisation, for intransitive subject (S) and transitive object (O). In contrast, for 1st and 2nd person pronouns nominative form covers A and S functions and accusative is used for O function.

Despite this morphological split, there is homogeneity in syntax. Dyirbal operates with an exclusively S/O pivot (grammaticalised topic). Two clauses can only be adjoined to form a sentence if they have a shared argument which is in S or O function in each (it can be omitted from a non-initial clause in the pivot chain). As illustrated in (13), an anti-passive derivation is available to place an underlying A argument into surface S function, so that it can take part in a pivot chain.

Basic grammatical points relevant to the discussion of noun markers are summarised here.

2.1 Case and genitive suffixes on nouns and adjectives

Nouns and adjective select one term from the following system:

Core syntactic cases:

1. ABSolute (S and O functions): zero realisation.

2. ERGative (A function). Allomorphs include -ŋgu after a disyllabic stem
ending in a vowel, -gu after a longer stem ending in a vowel, -du after n, -bu after m, and -u after r.

Peripheral syntactic cases:

3. INSTrumental: identical to ergative. The two cases are distinguished syntactically: the anti-passive derivation affects ergative and leaves instrumental unchanged, while the applicative derivation affects instrumental and leaves ergative unchanged.

4. DATive: gu.

Peripheral locational cases:

5. ALLative: -gu. This has the same form as dative; they are distinguished by the fact that a dative noun or adjective is accompanied by a dative noun marker — as in (13), (17), (30b), (38) and (39a) — while an allative noun or adjective is accompanied by an allative verb marker — as in (19).

6. ABLative: -ŋunu.

7. LOCative: identical to ergative but with final -a in place of -u.

Cases mark the function of an NP within a clause. This system of nominal suffixes also includes one suffix marking function within an NP.

8 GENitive: -ŋu after a vowel, liquid or semi-vowel. -u after a nasal.

Genitive is essentially a derivation. A genitive modifier within an NP takes the same case ending as the noun it modifies; for example yara-ŋu (man-GEN.ABS)
guda (dog.ABS) 'man's dog' in S or O function, yara-ŋu-njin-du (man-GEN-LINKER-ERG) guda-ŋgu (dog-ERG) 'man's dog' in A function. Note that genitive is used only for alienable (including kinship) possession, as in (7). A whole-part relationship ('inalienable possession') is shown just by apposition, as in (6).

2.2 Case and genitive forms of pronouns

There are singular, dual and plural numbers for 1st and 2nd person pronouns. Their paradigm is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NOMinative (S and A functions)</th>
<th>ACCusative (O function)</th>
<th>DATive</th>
<th>GENitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1sg</td>
<td>ŋaja</td>
<td>ŋaygu-na</td>
<td>ŋaygu-ŋu</td>
<td>ŋaygu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2sg</td>
<td>ŋinda</td>
<td>ŋinu-na</td>
<td>ŋinu-ŋu</td>
<td>ŋinu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1du</td>
<td>ŋali</td>
<td>ŋali-na</td>
<td>ŋali-ŋu</td>
<td>ŋali-ŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2du</td>
<td>ŋubala</td>
<td>ŋubala-na</td>
<td>ŋubala-ŋu</td>
<td>ŋubala-nu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pl</td>
<td>ŋana</td>
<td>ŋana-na</td>
<td>ŋana-ŋu</td>
<td>ŋana-ŋu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2pl</td>
<td>ŋuray</td>
<td>ŋura-na</td>
<td>ŋura-ŋu</td>
<td>ŋura-ŋu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The plurals and duals show regular suffixes added to the nominative (with final y omitted from 2pl): accusative -na, dative -ŋu, and genitive -ŋu after a disyllabic and -nu after a longer form. For the singulars, accusative -na and dative -ŋu are added to the genitive.

An important point is that there is no 3sg pronoun. As will be seen below, noun markers carry some of the functional load of 3sg pronouns in other
languages. There are 3du and 3pl pronouns, which differ between dialects and are on a different pattern from 1st and 2nd persons.

2.3 Verbs

There is a strict division between transitive verbs (taking A and O arguments) and intransitives (taking an S argument).

There are also two conjugations, which are independent of transitivity. The main verbal inflections are:

• PAST tense: -ñu ~ -n.
• FUTure tense: -ñi.

In southern dialects, past tense also covers present, and is glossed 'NON-FUTURE'. In northern dialects, future tense also covers present, and is glossed 'NON-PAST'.

• IMPerative: zero realisation.
• PURPosive: -ygu ~ -li.

A sequence VERB$_1$-TENSE VERB$_2$-PURP means that the action of verb$_1$ is carried out so that the activity referred to by verb$_2$ should eventuate. If the first verb in an utterance is inflected with purposive, this means 'should do, want to do', as in (39a) and (39b).

• Relative Clause (RC) suffix -jyu. This is followed by the case inflection in the main clause of the common argument which is shared by main and relative clauses; see (30b).

The most common verb in the language, yanu- ‘go’ is slightly irregular. Its
past tense form is just *yanu, when *yanu-l would be expected.

2.4 Noun classes

Each noun belongs to one of four noun classes (or genders). These are shown only by form of a noun marker which accompanies the noun in its NP. The rough semantic contents of the classes are:

M  human masculine, moon, rainbow; non-human animate
F  human feminine, sun; water; fire; fighting
E  edible vegetables and fruit
N  all else (neuter) — including trees with non-edible parts and 'place'

There are also a number of principles for shifting noun class membership and, of course, some assignments that are irregular and cannot currently be explained.

3. Noun markers

A noun is generally accompanied by a 'noun marker' showing the location of its referent, case (or genitive), and noun class. By far the most common marker begins with ba-, meaning 'there and visible'. It also has a default function, used when distance and visibility are not relevant. Noun markers reflect the core, syntactic peripheral and genitive forms of inflections on nouns and adjectives.
3.1 Noun markers with *ba- 'there' (and default form)

The *ba- paradigm is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun class</th>
<th>ABSolute (S and O functions)</th>
<th>ERGative (A function) and INStrumental</th>
<th>DATive</th>
<th>GENitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>bayi</td>
<td>ba-ŋgu-l</td>
<td>ba-gu-l</td>
<td>ba-ŋu-l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>bala-n ~ ba-n</td>
<td>ba-ŋgu-n</td>
<td>ba-gu-n</td>
<td>ba-ŋu-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>bala-m ~ ba-m</td>
<td>ba-ŋgu-m</td>
<td>ba-gu-m</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>bala</td>
<td>ba-ŋgu</td>
<td>ba-gu</td>
<td>ba-ŋu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The absolutive M form *bayi is irregular; it would be expected to be *bala-l. For F and E absolutive, long and short forms bala-n and ba-n and bala-m and ba-m bear no semantic difference and are in free variation. There is no genitive form in the E noun class because a fruit or vegetable cannot be alienable possessor. (The form *baŋum is actually a verb marker 'from there'; see §4.)

Added to root *ba(la)-, the paradigm is (apart from *bayi) completely regular, with case suffixes zero, -ŋgu-, -gu- and -ŋu-, followed by noun class endings -l for M, -n for F, -m for E, and zero for N.

The root appears to be bala- for absolutive and ba- elsewhere. In fact, longer forms based on bala- are occasionally used in place of those in the last three columns. They carry a meaning of indeterminacy. For example, one may hear bala-ŋgu-l 'man (A function) somewhere or other there', in place of the much more frequent ba-ŋgu-l 'man (A function) there'.

We can now illustrate an absolutive noun marker in an NP. (Noun and verb
markers are printed in bold throughout.)

(3) /[bayi yirriñjila]₀/ ŋajaₐ ŋinu-ngu buwa-ñu/

THERE.ABS.M dragonfly.ABS 1sg.NOM 2sg-DAT tell-NON.FUT

The dragonfly, I told about it to you

The NP in O function for (3) has head noun yirriñjila 'dragonfly' which, being non-human animate, belongs to the M noun class. It is accompanied by the absolutive M form of the 'there' and default noun marker, bayi.

Example (4) also includes bayi in the O noun phrase, and noun class F ergative form ba-ŋgu-n in the A NP, alongside head noun yabu 'mother'. All three nouns in (4) bear derivational suffix -jarran 'a pair of'. (Note the discontinuous A NP, its two components separated by the verb.)

(4) /[bayi muwarri-jarran/ ŋalŋga-jarran]₀

THERE.ABS.M initiated.youth-PAIR.ABS child-PAIR.ABS

ba-ŋgu-ₐ ŋinay-ma-n / yabu-jarran-duₐ/

THERE-ERG-F sit-APPLIC-NON.FUT mother-PAIR-ERG

The pair of mothers camped (lit. sat) with the pair of children, (newly)

initiated youths

An NP most often includes an appropriate noun marker, but there are many exceptions. In speaking Dyirbal, it would be pedantic always to include one, and
infelicitous never to do so. Example (5) is from George Watson's life story, recounting how one of his kinsmen helped a policeman to locate him in the forest, for transportation to a penal settlement. Here the A NP includes noun marker \textit{ba-ŋgu-l}. The O NP, whose head is \textit{bulijiman} 'policeman' (a loan from English) could have included \textit{bayi} but in this instance does not.

(5) /\textbf{ba-ŋgu-l} Munudiyur-u\textsubscript{A} bulijiman\textsubscript{O} bani-ma-n \textbf{THERE-ERG-M Sandy.King-ERG policeman.ABS come-APPLIC-PAST} \ŋaygu-ŋu \ŋimal-ŋay-gu/ 1sg-DAT grab-ANTI.PASSIVE-PURP

Sandy King brought (lit. came with) the policeman to catch (lit. grab) me

A pivot chain links a number of clauses which share an argument that is in S or O function in each. Typically, the pivot NP is stated in full at the beginning with just its noun marker being repeated later in the chain. The noun marker is functioning like an anaphoric 3rd person pronoun. For example, when Bessie Jerry was explaining how a bark blanket used to be made, in the olden days, she began:
A fig tree (Ficus variegata) was cut down, the bark was peeled off it, it was peeled off, just the top layer was peeled off, to be carried away.

This illustrates the S/O pivot (ergative syntax) of Dyirbal. In (6) there are five transitive verbs whose common O argument is bala magurra 'fig tree', expanded to bala magurra guga 'fig tree bark'. No NP in A function is stated for any of the verbs. There may have been a single agent all through, or different agents for the various operations — felling the tree, peeling off its bark, separating off the top layer of bark, and carrying it away (to be made into a blanket). The focus here is on the tree and its bark, and what happens to it.

The possibilities for inclusion in an NP are wide. For example, in (7) — from a story by Daisy Denham — the discontinuous A NP includes pronoun, noun marker, and head noun, plus an embedded alienable possessor phrase which consists of noun marker and head noun.
3.2 Noun markers with ya- 'here' and giyi/giña- 'this'

The paradigm for noun markers commencing with ya- is:

(8) Noun class (Absolutive form) ERGative (A function) and INSTRumental DATive GENitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(yayi)</th>
<th>ya-ŋgu-l</th>
<th>ya-gu-l</th>
<th>ya-ŋu-l</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>(yala-n)</td>
<td>ya-ŋgu-n</td>
<td>ya-gu-n</td>
<td>ya-ŋu-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>(yala-m)</td>
<td>ya-ŋgu-m</td>
<td>ya-gu-m</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>(yala)</td>
<td>ya-ŋgu</td>
<td>ya-gu</td>
<td>ya-ŋu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noun markers with ya- from the ergative/instrumental, dative and genitive columns behave exactly like ba- forms. An example where the referent of the A NP is 'here' and that of the O NP is, contrastively 'there' is:

(7) /ñubalasn wiyama-ŋ/ [ba-n bulgu-jarran

2du.NOM do.what-FUT THERE.ABS-F wife-PAIR.ABS

[ba-ŋu-l mugirray-ŋu]POSS]S/

THERE-GEN-M.ABS elder.brother-GEN.ABS

What are you two, pair of wives of the elder brother, going to be doing?
The spangled drongo bird (*Dicrurus hottentottus*) here picked up the fire there.

This comes from Andy Denham's recounting the legend of the origin of fire. The spangled drongo snatched the only fire in the world from the clutches of the rainbow snake, and this is why the bird is in F noun class, the same as fire.

*Ya-* markers mean 'here'. They are not demonstratives and do not mean 'this'. Also they cannot be used in S or O function. What we get instead is a separate set of demonstrative markers; they only have absolutive form and only occur in S or O function:

(10) **Noun class**  **Demonstrative (S and O functions)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>giyi</th>
<th>giña-n</th>
<th>giña-m</th>
<th>giña</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As usual, suffixes -*n*, -*m* and zero are used for the F, E and N noun classes, and the M form *giyi* is again irregular.
In his autobiographical narrative, George Watson (whose birth was due to rape of his Aboriginal mother by a white man) tells how his grandfather kept him from a police round-up of part-bloods, saying:

(11) /ŋayi/ ŋajaA giyiO wabu-ŋga buyba-ŋ/

   yes 1sg.NOM THIS.M forest-LOC hide-NON.PAST

Yes, I'll hide this [masculine one] in the scrub

And in a story from traditional religion describing how ancestral beings called Jujaba created the world:


   Jujaba-ERG THERE-ERG-M THIS.N 1pl-GEN.ABS place.ABS
   wayu-ma-n/ ŋinay-ma-li yala-y/

   transformed-CAUS-PAST sit-APPLIC-PURP HERE-LOC

   Jujaba created these places of ours, to be lived in here (by us)

Demonstratives only occur in S or O function. But what if we want to have deictic reference to an argument in transitive subject function, A? An anti-passive derivation is applied, putting the argument which is in underlying A into surface S function. When Tommy Warren related the story of ancestral being Girugarr, who travelled through the land naming places, he employed the transitive verb *manja-* 'point out by shouting'. *Girugarr* would be in A function
for verb manja- and bala mija 'places' would be in O function. Anti-passive, shown by -ŋa- on the verb, puts Girugarr into S function, referred to by demonstrative giyi. And the erstwhile O argument, bala mija 'places' is now in dative form, ba-gu mija-gu.

(13) /jaŋja baŋum [ba-gu mija-gu]

now THERE-ABL THERE-DAT.N place-DAT

manja-manjal-ŋa-yarray-gu giyi yanu-ŋ/

REDUP-point.out-ANTI.PASSIVE-BEGIN.PURP THIS.M go-FUT

Now from there this [masculine one] goes to point out by a shout all the places

Example (13) illustrates the exceptional freedom of word order in Dyirbal. In temporal sequence, the first clause has verb yanu-ŋ 'will go' and the second has the verb in purposive inflection manja-manjal-ŋa-yarray-gu 'in order to start to point out a lot' (verbal reduplication indicates 'do a lot' and derivational suffix -yarray- is 'start to do'). In fact, the verbs occur in reverse order, their logical relationship being clear from the inflections they bear.

A verb marker with ya- 'here' has never been heard in the same NP with a ba- 'there' marker. However, a demonstrative may co-occur with an absolutive ba- form. This is illustrated by Chloe Grant's story of the how a man transmogrified into the spirit Jigubina, who can be seen as a shooting star streaking across the sky. In (14) the first clause has a discontinuous S NP, with
*bayi giyi* preceding the verb *wayu-bi-n* and *mija-ŋunu yara* following it. Then in the second clause the pivot NP is recapitulated by *bayi* 'he'.

\[
(14) \quad /[\text{bayi} \quad \text{giyi}]_{\text{S}} \quad \text{wayu-bi-n}
\]

\[
\text{THERE.ABS.M} \quad \text{THIS.M} \quad \text{transformed-BECOME-NON.FUT}
\]

\[
[\text{mija-ŋunu} \quad \text{yara}]/_{\text{S}} \quad \text{bayi}_{\text{S}} \quad \text{Jigubina-bi-n}/
\]

\[
\text{camp-ABL} \quad \text{man.ABS} \quad \text{THERE.ABS.M} \quad \text{Jigubina-BECOME-NON.FUT}
\]

This man there from the camp became transformed; he became a Jigubina

Putative absolutive forms of *ya-* noun markers were included in parentheses in (8). They cannot occur in S and O function. However there are some suffixes which may be added to the absolutive forms of noun marker, and these do involve *yayi*, *yalan*, etc. For instance, with aversive ('for fear of') -*ńŋga*, we can get *bayi-ńŋga* 'for fear of M referent there' and *yayi-ńŋga* 'for fear of M referent here'. (Note that there are no short forms of *yala-n*, *yala-m* similar to *ba-n* and *ba-m*.)

### 3.3 Noun markers with *ŋa-* 'non-visible'

The third variety of noun markers begins with *ŋa-* 'non-visible'. Its paradigm is identical to that of *ba*, in (2), with initial *ba-* replaced by *ŋa-*.
Chloe Grant told of sitting around the campfire when she was a girl and hearing a noise which sounded like talking, but was so far off that one couldn't make out what was being said (this is described by noun *mulgu*). The old people said that it must be made by the frightful female spirit Dambun.

In (16), absolutive F form *ŋala-n* refers to something which is heard but not seen.

In (17), dative E form *ŋa-gu-m* is used for something remembered from the past (and not currently visible). Ida Henry recounted how a man told the mother of two boys:
\[(17) \quad /\text{ñalŋga-jarran}_o/ \text{ŋaja}_A \quad \text{munda-ñ} \quad [\text{bayi} \quad \text{daman-jarran}]_O
\]

\[
\quad \text{child-PAIR.ABS} \quad \text{1sg.NOM} \quad \text{lead-FUT} \quad \text{THERE.ABS.M} \quad \text{son-PAIR.ABS}
\]

\[
[\text{gayŋgal-gu/} \quad \text{ŋa-gu-m-guŋgarri}/
\]

\[
\quad \text{finger.cherry-DAT} \quad \text{NON.VIS-DAT-E-NORTH}
\]

I'll take the pair of children, your two sons, for finger cherries

\textit{(Rhodomyrtus macrocarpa)}, remembered to be (in a place) to the north

In §3.1, longer forms of \textit{ba}- noun markers were mentioned; for example

\textit{bala-ŋgu-l} — indicating indeterminacy, 'somewhere' — rather than \textit{ba-ŋgu-l}. No such longer forms have been encountered for \textit{ya}- or \textit{ŋa}- markers.

\textit{Ya}- and \textit{ba}- markers cannot co-occur, whereas demonstrative and \textit{ba}- forms may feature in the same NP. And so may \textit{ŋa}- and \textit{ba}- forms; this is illustrated in (27), (31b), (34) and (36).

4. Verb markers

Whereas a noun in a core or syntactic peripheral case, or in genitive, may be accompanied by a noun marker (showing its noun class, and agreeing with it in case), a noun in a peripheral locational case — allative, ablative or locative — may be accompanied by a verb marker (or verb modifier). This agrees with the noun in case but does not show noun class. The full paradigm of verb markers is:
The first entry in each row for the *ba-* column is the most common form — *ba-лу* 'to a place there', *ba-ли* 'in a direction there', *ba-ŋум* 'from there' and *bала-ъ* 'at there'. As with non-absolutive *ba-* noun markers, the longer forms indicate indeterminacy: *bала-ру* 'to some place or other over there (possibly also involving a circuitous route)', and so on.

Nominal suffix *-gu* is used for both the syntactic peripheral case dative and the locational peripheral case allative. Exemplifying with noun *миja* 'place, camp, house', we can have dative *миja-гу* with noun marker *ба-гу* 'for the house (e.g. to build it)'. Or allative *миja-гу* can co-occur with either of the allative verb markers — *балу миja-гу* 'to the place there' or *бали миja-гу* 'in the direction of the place there'. Similarly with *яа-* and *яа-* noun and verb markers.

Verb markers communing with *яа-* appear just to have the 'remembered' sense. There is no allative of direction form in the *яа-* column. That is, one may say *яа-лу* 'to a place remembered from the past' — as in (22) — but not *яа-ли* 'in a direction remembered from the past'. In fact, there is a commonly-occurring pronoun, 1st dual *ъали*, used in (21); and it is a feature of Dyirbal that it generally avoids homonyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>'there'</th>
<th>'here'</th>
<th>'non-visible'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALLative of place</td>
<td><em>бала-лу</em>, <em>бала-ру</em></td>
<td><em>яа-лу</em></td>
<td><em>ъа-лу</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALLative of direction</td>
<td><em>бала-ли</em>, <em>бала-рри</em></td>
<td><em>яа-ли</em></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLative</td>
<td><em>бала-ŋум</em>, <em>бала-ŋум</em></td>
<td><em>яа-ŋум</em></td>
<td><em>ъа-ŋум</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCative</td>
<td><em>бала-ъ</em></td>
<td><em>ъала-ъ</em></td>
<td><em>ъала-ъ</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is just one verb marker which also has a temporal meaning: *ba-ŋum* can be either 'from there' — as in (13) — or 'and then' — as in (22).

In (19), verb marker *ba-lu* co-occurs with a noun in allative case, in (20) *bala*-y is used with a noun in locative case, and in (21) *ya-ŋum* accompanies one in ablative case.

(19) /[bayi yara]s

Theresa.ABS.M man.ABS

[bal-bawal buluba-gu] yanu/

THERE-ALL(PLACE)-LONG.WAY corroboree.ground-ALL go.PAST

The man there went to a corroboree ground a long way off there

(20) /ŋaygu-naO yabundi-guA yuba-n/

1sg.ACC mother-ERG put.down-PAST

[bala-y Dabagiyam-ba]/

THERE-LOC Top.Camp-LOC

Mother gave birth to me (lit. put me down) at Top Camp (an 1890s mining camp where Aborigines worked for the miners)

(21) /ŋaliS banaga-ŋ ya-ŋum burbi-ŋunu/

1du.NOM go.home-FUT HERE-ABL half.way-ABL

We'll go home from here, from half-way
Verb markers are frequently used on their own, without any accompanying noun. We have *yala*-y 'at here' in (12), *ba-ŋum* 'from here' in (13), and reduplicated *bali*-bali 'in that direction' in (35). An example with *ŋa*-lu 'to a place remembered from the past' is:

\[(22) \quad /\text{baŋum} \quad \text{bayi}_8/ \quad \text{bani-ŋu} /\]

\begin{align*}
\text{AND.THEN} & \quad \text{THERE.ABS.M} \quad \text{come-NON.FUT} \\
\text{ŋa-lu} & \quad \text{guya} \quad \text{bagaga-ŋu} \quad \text{bayi}_8/ \\
\text{NON.VIS-ALL(PLACE)-OTHER.SIDE} & \quad \text{turn.off.path-PAST} \quad \text{THERE.ABS.M}
\end{align*}

Then he came; he turned off the path to a place remembered on the other side

5. **Bound forms**

As will have been noticed from the examples thus far, noun and verb markers may be followed by bound forms indicating location:

- `-gala' up', `-gali' down' — in (32) and (35) — and `-galu' out in front' — in (27), (31a/b), (33–34), and (37).
- `-bawal' long way (in any direction)' — in (19) and (29).
- `-guya' on the other side (of river, path, etc.)' — in (22).
- suffixes indicating long, medium and short distance uphill and downhill, and medium and long distance upstream and downstream. Those in examples here are `-dayi' short distance uphill' — in (36) — `-daya' medium distance uphill' — in (39a) — and `-dawulu' long way upstream' — in (38).
• -guŋgarri 'north' — in (17) — and -guŋgurru 'south'.

6. Interrogative noun and verb markers

Parallel to ba-, ya- and ya- forms, there are interrogative noun markers, set out in (23), and interrogative verb markers, in (24), both based on wuňja- and meaning 'where'. Once again, the absolutive M noun marker is irregular, being wuňjiň, where *wuňja-l would be expected. Note that the allative verb markers end in -rri and -rru, as do the longer indefinite forms of the allative ba- markers, in (18).

(23) Noun class ABSolute (S and O functions) ERGative (A function) and INSTRumental DATive GENitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun class</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSolute</td>
<td>Wuňjiň</td>
<td>Wuňja-n</td>
<td>Wuňja-m</td>
<td>Wuňja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERGative</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋgu-l</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋgu-n</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋgu-m</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋgu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATive</td>
<td>Wuňja-gu-l</td>
<td>Wuňja-gu-n</td>
<td>Wuňja-gu-m</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENitive</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋu-l</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋu-n</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋu-m</td>
<td>Wuňja-ŋu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(24) ALLative of place, 'to which place'       Wuňja-rri

ALLative of direction, 'in which direction'     Wuňja-rru

ABLative, 'from where'                         Wuňja-ŋum

LOCative, 'at where'                           Wuňja-y
Unlike *ba*- , *ya*- and *ŋa*- forms, interrogative noun markers do not co-occur with a noun, but make up a whole NP, as in (25), where *Yimanu* is verbless clause subject and *wuñja-n* is verbless clause complement:

(25) /Yimanu_{vcs}  *wuñja-n_{vcc}/

Dinah.ABS  WHERE.ABS-F

Where is Dinah?

Interrogative verb markers provide direct qualification of a verb, without any accompanying noun in the same case.

Interrogative noun markers can co-occur with *ba*- and especially with *ŋa*- markers. If something cannot be seen, it is natural to enquire where it is. For example *wuñja  yala* 'where is that (noun class N) noise?' .

7 Meanings of *ŋa*- markers

We now survey the range of meanings of non-visual noun and verb markers, commencing with *ŋa*- . Noun markers occur in all senses, verb markers only with the 'remembered' sense, (e)

(a) Only known from its noise

A *ŋa*- noun marker may occur in an NP with a noun referring to a type of noise.

In (16) we had *ŋala-n* with *mulgu* 'noise that sounds like talking but the words
cannot be made out either because it is too far off or because it is mumbled'. In (26) ŋayi is in an NP with wawan 'noise made by a person or animal walking over dry leaves or grass'.

(26) /gaji ŋayi, ŋamba

TRY NON.VIS.ABS:M listen.IMP

[wawan yanu-ŋu]RC O

noise.of.walking.ABS go-RC.ABS

Listen to the trampling noise of some [M thing] who is going!

The third component of the O NP in (16) is relative clause yanu-ŋu, 'who is going'. This involves relative clause (RC) suffix -ŋu followed by the case appropriate to the NP it is in —here, absolutive, with zero realisation.

In (27) the non-visible noun marker is followed by an onomatopoeic representation of the sound of running d-d-d-d-d:

(27) /ŋayi-n-galu bayi/ d-d-d-d-d/

NON.VIS.ABS.M.-LINKER-OUT.IN.FRONT THERE.ABS.M onomatopoeia

He could be heard going out in front, d-d-d-d-d-d.

Example (28) comes from Chloe Grant's story of a man in a fight. He holds up his shield and buum represents the sounds of spears hitting it. Bigin 'shield' is in noun class F and thus the F noun marker ŋala-n is used.
In (26–28) something is known only from its noise. But people often want to know what it is making a noise. When a bird (F noun class) is heard calling out in a particular way, it indicates that some person or animal is approaching. Two sisters heard such a bird call and one told the other to go and look to see what it was:

(29) /gaji bura ιa-n-bawal/,

TRY see.IMP NON.VIS.ABS-F-LONG.WAY

Go on, look for (the sources of) the noise a long way off!

A similar example comes from a story told by George Watson, again involving two sisters wishing to discover what a bird was singing about:

(30) (a) /ba-ŋgu-nA giga-n [bala-n midi]O/ buŋa-li/

THERE/ERG-F tell-PAST THERE.ABS-F small.ABS go.down-PURP

She [the big sister] told the small one to go downhill:
(b) **gaji ŋinda₂ buŋa/**
TRY 2sg.NOM go.down.IMP

\[ŋa-gu-l \quad miña-gu/ [ŋiïyɪ-ŋgu₃/ baya-ŋu-gu]_{RC}\]/

'Go on, you go downhill, to [see] what (M thing) it is the birds are singing about!'

In (30b) the long dative NP describes what the younger sister is going downhill for. Its head is miña 'what' (which inflects like a noun), accompanied by non-visual noun marker ŋa-gu-l and a relative clause consisting of transitive verb baya-'sing about' and its A NP which is noun ńiïyɪ 'noise bird makes when it is drawing attention to something moving along'. Dative case suffix -gu follows relative clause marker -ŋu on baya-.

(b) **Previously visible but now just audible**

A curlew (noun class F) was seen flying, with 'there' noun marker ba-n. Then it moved out of vision — non-visible noun marker ńan-n — but was known to be still flying since its distinctive call continued to be heard:
I saw a bush stone curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*) out in front, which was flying.

In a story told by Tommy Springcart, a man sees a fruit hanging from a tree and knocks it down with a thrown stick. In the first clause of (32), the O NP for verb *minba* - 'hit with a long rigid implement which is thrown' is 'there' noun marker *bala-m* since he can see the fruit on the tree. In the second clause, non-visible noun marker *ŋala-m* is used as the S NP for *baji* - 'fall' since the man's vision is obscured and he cannot actually see the fruit falling.
(32) /minba-n bala-m$_0$ wirrga-ŋgu/

hit-NON.FUT THERE.ABS-E stick-INST

ŋala-m$_s$-gali$_s$ baji-gu /

NON.VIS.ABS-E-DOWN fall-PURP

(He) threw a wirrga stick (a nulla nulla) at the fruit, and as a consequence it is heard falling down

(c) Neither visible nor audible

In a story concerning early years after the European invasion, one Dyirbal man escaped a white tyrant by crawling beneath a tree, where he was no longer visible (nor, of course, audible):

(33) /yanu bayi$_s$ guyñan-da-rru

go.NON.FUT THERE.ABS.M Moreton.Bay.tree-LOC-THROUGH

juyma-n ŋira-ŋga-rru

crawl-NON.FUT underneath-LOC-THROUGH

ŋayi-n-galu jaña/

NON.VIS.ABS.M-LINKER-OUT.IN.FRONT now

And he went crawling underneath a Moreton Bay hardwood tree

(Eucalyptus tessellaris) and now he was no longer visible

In (33) there are two verbs making up a discontinuous serial verb construction, *yanu juyma-n* 'went crawled'. The discontinuous locative NP consists of noun
guyñan 'Moreton Bay tree' and adjective ñira 'underneath' both with locative case suffix followed by -rru 'along, through'.

The text collection includes several descriptions of sunset, when the sun itself is no longer visible but its light remains. Sentence (34) consists just of an NP, with its three words in absolutive form, plus time word jañja 'now'.

(34) /ŋa-n-galu jañja ba-n garri /
NON.VIS.ABS-F-OUT.IN.FRONT now THERE:ABS sun.ABS

The sun is out in front now and not visible

There is one textual description of sunrise, also including a non-visible noun marker. The sun has not yet appeared and so, interestingly, we get the N noun class form ñala. It takes suffix -gali 'down', indicating that the dawn light is just above the horizon.

(35) /ñala-gali bali-bali ganda-ñu /
NON.VIS.ABS.N-DOWN REDUP.THERE.ALL(DIRECTION) burn-NON.FUT

Something non-visible is burning down in that direction

(d) Spirits are described as non-visible

Throughout Australia, there is a spirit which can take the form of a rainbow or a snake. In one tale told by Chloe Grant, two women climb a tree to capture starlings and their climbing vine falls down. They call out for someone to help
them descend. The rainbow appears and suggests that they should climb down him (they decline). They can see the rainbow, but since he is a spirit the non-visible noun marker is employed:

(36) /ŋayi-n-dayi bayi\_s
NON.VIS.ABS.M-LINKER-SHORT.WAY.UPHILL THERE.ABS.M

bandu.bana-n/

bend.over-NON.FUT

He [the rainbow], a little way uphill, bent over up there (suggesting that they climb down him)

One day Bessie Jerry explained how Dambun spirits can take on human form. You might see what appear to be two women and start following them, and then you wonder who you are following, that they are probably spirits.

(37) /bambay ŋinda\_A banja-ñ
unknowingly 2sgA follow-NON.FUT

[ŋa-n-galu wañuña]\_O/

NON.VIS.ABS-F-OUT.IN.FRONT WHO.ACC

You might follow them unknowingly and wonder who you're following

(e) **Remembered**

Example (17) used non-visible dative E noun marker *ŋa-gu-m* to describe a man
taking his grandsons to gather finger cherries, whose location he remembers. In

(22) the non-visible allative of place verb marker *ŋa-lu* describes travelling
towards a remembered place.

In a story told by Ida Henry, two girls have killed a black goanna and dug
an earth oven to cook it. They go to a place where they remember seeing the
right kind of leaves to cover the earth oven:

(38) /yanu [ba-n nayi-jarran]\$_s$/
go-NON.FUT THERE.ABS-F girl-PAIR.ABS
[gubu-gu *ŋa-gu-dawulu]/
leaf-DAT NON.VIS-DAT.N-LONG.WAY.UPSTREAM

The two girls went for leaves in a place remembered from the past a long
way upstream

In another of Ida Henry's narratives, an old man realises that his life is
drawing to a close, and plans to travel to a place he remembers, his father's
father's conception site, where he wishes to die:
(39) (a) /[ŋa-gu-l-daya bulunja-gu]  
NON.VIS-DAT-M-MID.DISTANCE.UPHILL father's.father-DAT  
anja ŋajaŋa banagay-gu /  
NEW.ACTION 1sg.NOM return-PURP  
And I want to go back to my father's father remembered place a 
medium distance uphill  
(b) anja ŋajaŋa bala-y guyi-bi-li/ jaŋja/  
NEW.ACTION 1sg.NOM THERE-LOC spirit-BECOME-PURP now  
I want to die (lit. become a spirit) there now

8. Conclusion

Dyirbal assigns importance to distinguishing between things which can be seen 
and are real, and everything else. And, when something is visible and real, 
whether it is near the speaker — noun and verb markers commencing with ya- 
'here' — or not near the speaker, or where location is irrelevant — noun and verb 
markers commencing with ba- 'there'. Noun markers commencing with ŋa- are 
used of spirits, which may appear to be visible but are not real. And for anything 
within the context of speaking which cannot be seen — it may be audible or 
neither visible nor audible. In addition, a person or place or direction 
remembered from the past is referred to by a ŋa- noun or verb marker.  

All this is consistent with the requirement for precision, mentioned at the 
very beginning of this chapter. If possible, one should always employ a specific 
term, rather than a vague or general one. However, it should not be inferred from
this that the Dyirbal speech community lacks, or does not use, generic terms (that they are incapable of conceptualising in general terms).

When, in traditional times, one was speaking in the presence of a classificatory mother-in-law, son-in-law, father-in-law or daughter-in-law, it was required to employ a special speech register called Jalnguy (dubbed 'mother-in-law language' by Chloe Grant). Jalnguy has the same phonology, phonetics, morphology and syntax as the everyday language style, but every single lexeme (except for the four grandparent terms) is different.

Whereas the everyday style has a profusion of specific terms, Jalnguy operates entirely with generic terms. The everyday register has names for a score of species of dangerous snakes, but Jalnguy simply has the general term bayi jumbiñ ‘venemous snake’. Similarly for other nouns, for adjectives and for verbs. Jalnguy is an avoidance style, used to mark a relationship of taboo. While a high value is placed on precision in normal speech, it is considered appropriate to be deliberately vague in an avoidance situation.

There you have it — different levels of specificity and generality, each in its proper place.

Appendix

Just the main points of Dyirbal grammar have been outlined here — those necessary for understanding the discussion of noun and verb markers. A full account is in Dixon (1972), including details of dialect differences. See especially pages 38-58, 222, 254-64, 306-11. The S/O pivot is also described and
exemplified in Dixon (1994: 9-18, 160-72). All examples in this chapter are from
texts; some have been lightly edited, omitting repetitions and the like.

Examples (5), (11–12), (19-20), (25), and (30) are from stories told by
George Watson in Mamu, a northern dialect. The remaining examples are from
recordings in Dyirbal, a southern dialect, by Chloe Grant, Ida Henry, Bessie
Jerry, Daisy Denham, Andy Denham, Tommy Springcart, and Tommy Warren. I
thank these friends and teachers, now all returned to the land of spirits, for
teaching me their wonderful language.

Non-visible markers recur in the poetic style employed in Dyirbal songs.
The 174 songs documented in Dixon and Koch (1996) includes six ŋa- noun
markers — in songs Gama-E (pp. 81-2), Gama-Y (p. 100), Gama-AY (pp. 124-5),
Marrga-K (pp. 201-2), Jangala X (pp. 255-6), and Jangala-Z (pp. 258-9).

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