Yukulta and its relatives Kayardild and Lardil

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1 General introduction to the language

Yukulta, known also as Ganggalida, is an extinct member of the Southern branch of the non-Pama-Nyungan, Tangkic language family of northwestern Queensland, Australia. Key sources are a Masters thesis and related sketch grammar by Sandra Keen (1972, 1983) plus around twenty hours of Keen's field recordings, deposited at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra, Australia. These recordings are now undergoing transcription by the current author, and provide significant additional information about the language, however, since the recordings consist overwhelmingly of elicited sentence translations from English into Yukulta by a single speaker, it is very likely that some of Yukulta's grammatical and lexical resources went unrecorded.

Yukulta's rich nominal and verbal inflectional system is strictly suffixing and dependent-marking. Because inflection appears only at the end of stems, one can reliably distinguish polymorphemic stems, such as *kuna-mira-* in (1a), from syntactic phrases built on multiple stems, such as *kuna-* and *mira-* in (1b).

(1) Yukulta

a.	<i>kuna-mira-ṇṭa</i>	b.	<i>kuna-ṇṭa</i>	<i>mira-ṇṭa</i>
	small-INT-DAT		small-DAT	good-DAT
	'very small (DAT)'		'small, good (DAT)'	

The inflectional system distinguishes just two word classes: nominals (including all words in an NP) and verbals, and thus for example there is no inflectional distinction between nouns and adjectives. However, it is possible to distinguish syntactically between subclasses of nominals due to the strict word order in noun phrases, set out in (2).¹

(2) Word order of the Yukulta noun phrase :

determiner/possessive NP — number — adjective(s) — head noun — modifier(s)²

Outside of the NP, word order is highly flexible. Most main clauses host a second position clitic complex which marks features of core arguments and up to one oblique, as well as tense, (ir)reality and transitivity. Subjects and objects follow a complex mix of ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative alignment in main clauses, and subordinate clauses can be

marked with up to two layers of ‘complementising case’ (Dench & Evans 1988) which indicate tense/aspect and co-referentiality relationships between the matrix and subordinate clauses.

Since a practical orthography has not been established for Yukulta, forms will be transcribed phonemically, and in order to aid comparison between languages, phonemic transcriptions will also be used for Kayardild and Lardil. Words are presented in their citation forms, which can include overt, default inflection and the effects of phonological rules (on which, see Hale 1973; Round 2009, 2011).

2 Evaluative morphology in Yukulta

Yukulta possesses relatively little evaluative morphology that we know of, all of which is nominal or adjectival. Comparisons with Yukulta’s relatives Kayardild and Lardil are offered in §3. Kayardild possesses nominal, adjectival and verbal evaluative morphology; Lardil possesses only verbal evaluative morphology.

2.1 Intensifying and ameliorative *-mira* on adjectival and nominal bases

The nominal suffix *-mira* is related etymologically to the root *mira-* ‘good’. Its most abundantly attested evaluative use however is not as an ameliorative marker with the sense ‘good’, but as an intensifying adjectival marker, ‘very’, as in (3).

(3) Yukulta

a.	<i>kalkan-ta</i>	‘sick-ABS’	<i>kalkan-mira</i>	‘very sick (ABS)’
b.	<i>kupa-ɟa</i>	‘small-ABS’	<i>kupa-mira</i>	‘very small (ABS)’
c.	<i>paɬaŋu</i>	‘big(ABS)’	<i>paɬaŋu-mira</i>	‘very big (ABS)’
d.	<i>ɬali-ja</i>	‘laden-ABS’	<i>ɬali-mira</i>	‘heavily laden (ABS)’
e.	<i>wara-ɟa</i>	‘far-ABS’	<i>wara-mira</i>	‘very far (ABS)’

In (4a), *-mira* attaches to a nominal base ‘old man’ and yields an intensifying nominal stem ‘very old man’. In (4b) it attaches to the nominal base *pijan-* ‘swimmer’ (a nominalisation of *pijac-* ‘to swim’) and yields an ameliorative nominal stem ‘good swimmer’. These are the sole attestations I have of *-mira* attaching to nominal bases.

(4) Yukulta

a.	<i>palalapi</i>	‘old man (ABS)’	<i>palalapi-mira</i>	‘very old man (ABS)’
b.	<i>pijan-ta</i>	‘swimmer-ABS’	<i>pijan-mira</i>	‘good swimmer (ABS)’

2.2 Intensifying *-muɬa* on one adjectival base

The suffix *-muɬa* is etymologically related to the root *muɬa-* ‘much, many, plenty’. Example (5) is the sole attestation of evaluative *-muɬa*, where it attached to an adjectival stem and conveys an intensifying meaning.

- (5) Yukulta
kuṇa-ja ‘small-ABS’ *kuṇa-muṭa* ‘very small (ABS)’

2.3 Ameliorative *-paṭa* on kinship nouns

Keen’s recordings are mostly of one speaker, Alice Gilbert. However, in a short recording session, Sydney Webber makes the sole attested use of *-paṭa*, a suffix recognisable from Kayardild (cf §3.1) as an ameliorative marker on kin terms. Alice Gilbert did not use *-paṭa* in her many tokens of kin terms, and the suffix may have been dialectally restricted. In (6) the marker *-paṭa* displaces the meaningless KINship suffix *-cu* of *ṇari-cu* ‘father’s mother’.

- (6) Yukulta
ṇari-cu ‘father’s mother-KIN (ABS)’ *ṇari-paṭa* ‘dear granny (ABS)’

2.4 A note on non-evaluative forms containing *-mira* and *-muṭa*

In addition to their evaluative uses in §2.1 and §2.2, the elements *-mira* in §2.1 and *-muṭa* also appear in Yukulta compounds as in (7a,b).

- (7) Yukulta
 a. *maral-ta* ‘ear; hearing-ABS’ *maral-mira* ‘having good hearing (ABS)’
 b. *cul-ta* ‘bone-ABS’ *cul-muṭa* ‘(of fish) bony (ABS)’

In cases such as these, *-mira* and *-muṭa* should be interpreted not as evaluative suffixes, but as roots with their usual meanings, respectively ‘good’ and ‘much, many, plenty’. Like other NOUN+ADJECTIVE compounds in the language, the complex stems in (7a,b) are adjectival and have the sense ‘having [NOUN] which is [ADJECTIVE]’. By way of contrast, if *-mira* and *-muṭa* were acting as evaluative suffixes in (7a,b), then the complex stems should be nominal, just like the nominal roots to which *-mira* and *-muṭa* attach.

3 Comparison with related languages

Yukulta is compared with its Southern Tangkic sister, Kayardild, in §3.1 and with its Northern Tangkic cousin, Lardil, in §3.2.

3.1 Kayardild (Southern Tangkic)

Like Yukulta, Kayardild belongs to the Southern branch of Tangkic. Major sources on Kayardild are a comprehensive grammar by Evans (1995), formal analyses of phonology, morphology and syntax by Round (2009, 2013), as well as field recordings by Stephen Wurm in 1960, by Evans from the 1980s to the present, and by Round from 2005–2007. Like Yukulta, Kayardild employs the suffix *-mira* as an intensifying evaluative ‘very’ on adjectival stems (Evans 1995:194), as in (8).

(8) Kayardild

a.	<i>cuŋarpa</i>	'big (NOM)'	<i>cuŋarpa-mira</i>	'very big (NOM)'
b.	<i>palar-a</i>	'white-NOM'	<i>palar-mira</i>	'very white (NOM)'
c.	<i>muŋuru-wa</i>	'knowledgable-NOM'	<i>muŋuru-mira</i>	'very knowledgable (NOM)'

A related evaluative construction in Kayardild is *X-mira- X-*, in which the stem *X* appears twice, once suffixed with *-mira* and once, in the next word, as a simple stem:³

(9) Kayardild

a.	<i>mutha-a</i>	'much-NOM'	<i>muṭa-mira muṭa-a</i>	'very much' (NOM)
b.	<i>caṭarka</i>	'Crow (NOM)'
(proper name)	<i>caṭarka-mira caṭarka</i>	'truly Crow' (NOM)
c.	<i>taŋka-a</i>	'man-NOM'	<i>taŋka-mira taŋka-a</i>	'proper man' (NOM)
d.	<i>ŋicin-ta</i>	'1sgPOSS-NOM'	<i>ŋicin-mira ŋicin-ta</i>	'very much mine' (NOM)

In the *X-mira- X-* construction the stem *X* may be nominal (9b,c), in which case its intensifying meaning appears to be 'very much (an) *X*', comparable to the use of *-mira* on a noun stem in Yukulta's *palalaŋi-mira* 'very old man' in (4) above. In (9d) the stem *X* is a possessive pronominal stem.

Although Kayardild, like Yukulta, possess a root *muṭa-* 'much, many, plenty', it does not employ *-muṭa* as an intensifying suffix.

Like Yukulta, Kayardild uses the ameliorative suffix *-paṭa* on kin terms (10), where it optionally replaces the KIN suffixes *-cu* and *-tu* on those stems which have one (10b,c); and some *-paṭa* forms as in (10d) select exceptional stems (Evans 1995, 192).

(10) Kayardild

a.	<i>kacakaca</i>	'daddy (NOM)'	<i>kacakaca-paṭa</i>	'dear daddy (NOM)'
b.	<i>marka-tu-wa</i>	'father's sister-KIN-NOM'	<i>marka-(tu-)paṭa</i>	'dear auntie (NOM)'
c.	<i>papi-cu-wa</i>	'father's mother-KIN-NOM'	<i>papi-(cu-)paṭa</i>	'dear granny (NOM)'
d.	<i>ṭapu-cu-wa</i>	'elder brother-KIN-NOM'	<i>ṭapuṭa-paṭa</i>	'dear brother (NOM)'

An evaluative construction found in Kayardild but not in Yukulta is the verbal pejorative formed with the prefix *piṭin-*, shown in (11).⁴ The form *piṭin-* has a constant semantic value 'fail to do properly' (Evans 1995, 295–96). It bears a clear resemblance to *piṭi-* 'bad', though the etymological source final *n* is not known.

(11) Kayardild

a.	<i>ŋutic-a</i>	'throw-ACTUAL'	<i>piṭin-ŋutic-a</i>	'mis-throw-ACTUAL'
b.	<i>cinkac-a</i>	'follow-ACTUAL'	<i>piṭin-cinkac-a</i>	'fail to correctly-follow-ACTUAL'
c.	<i>ŋalamaṭ-a</i>	'marry-ACTUAL'	<i>piṭin-ŋalamaṭ-a</i>	'wrongly-marry-ACTUAL'

3.2 Lardil (Northern Tangkic)

Lardil is the sole member of the Northern branch of the Tangkic language family. Major sources are Klokeid (1976) and a sketch grammar and dictionary (Ngakulmungan Kangka Leman 1996), both of which are largely based on empirical fieldwork by Ken Hale in 1960.

Lardil has no equivalent of the evaluative suffixes described for Yukulta above. Its root *kupa-* ‘good’ does appear in an intensifying ‘very’ construction X- *kupa-* X-, which closely parallels the X-*mira-* X- of Kayardild both in form and semantics, however in Lardil the construction is not morphological, but phrasal, consisting of three separate words. Clear evidence for this is that each of the three words undergoes phonological processes which apply only word-finally. In (12) for example, final /ta/ deletes from underlying /kunʔakunʔa/ and final /a/ in underlying /kupa/ raises to surface u.⁵

- (12) Lardil
kunʔakunʔ ‘dry(NOM)’ *kunʔakunʔ kupu kunʔakunʔ* ‘completely dry’
(underlying form: /kunʔakunʔa kupa kunʔakunʔa/)

Though Lardil has no nominal or adjectival evaluatives, it does possess one minor evaluative construction, which is verbal. Four of the eight monosyllabic verbal roots in Lardil undergo reduplication which is semantically attenuative, with the sense ‘do X lightly’ as shown in (13).⁶

- (13) Lardil
a.	<i>peʔa</i>	‘bite’ (underlying: /pec/)	<i>peecpe</i>	‘nibble’ (/peec-pec/)
b.	<i>ʔaʔa</i>	‘spear’ (/ʔac/)	<i>ʔaala</i>	‘jab lightly’ (/ʔaac-ʔac/)
c.	<i>neʔa</i>	‘hit; kill’ (/nec/)	<i>neene</i>	‘tap softly’ (/neec-nec/)
d.	<i>maʔa</i>	‘seize; grab’ (/mac/)	<i>maapma</i>	‘twitch’ (/maac-mac/)

The association between monosyllabic reduplication and the ‘do X lightly’ meaning is difficult to attribute merely to chance, since the ‘do X lightly’ meaning is not associated with the reduplication of longer verbal roots in Lardil, nor with any verbal reduplications in Yukulta or Kayardild, despite the existence of several dozen reduplicated verbal stems.

To this extent, Lardil appears to be a counterexample to the proposed implicational universal (Nieuwenhuis 1985) that a language will only have verbal evaluative morphology if it has nominal evaluative morphology.

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Languages⁷

Kayardild (Tangkic, Southern branch)

Lardil (Tangkic, Northern branch)

Yukulta (Tangkic, Southern branch)

¹ Keen (1972; 1983) makes addition word class distinctions, such as 'time words, locational words', based on semantic criteria.

² The final 'modifier' position may be any of determiner, number or adjective.

³ Evans (1995, 195) transcribes an example of *X-mira*-*X*- as a single word, however, additional examples indicate that the correct segmentation is as two words — for example, in (9a,c), the second word behaves as a disyllable and takes the overt nominative suffix *-a*; this would not appear if the *X-mira X*- form were a single, six-syllable word.

⁴ Evans (1995, 296) mentions a verbal prefix *cil-/cul-* 'do intensely', but lexemes containing this element exhibit highly idiosyncratic semantics, such as *cilpu.ɭuɭ-a* 'stay in one place; keep doing something-ACTUAL', cf. *pu.ɭuɭ-a* 'gather-ACTUAL'.

⁵ On *a*-raising in Lardil, see Round (2011, 340–41).

⁶ In monosyllabic verbal reduplication, the vowel of the first copy is lengthened, shown here as *aa* and *ee*. On the presence of final, underlying /c/ in Lardil verb stems see Klokeid (1976), Round (2011, 336–7).

⁷ Kayardild and Yukulta are listed as 'Tangic' (sic) languages in ethnologue, and Tangkic is incorrectly classified as a subgroup of the Pama-Nyungan family. Lardil is misclassified in ethnologue, merely as Pama-Nyungan. Regarding the non-Pama-Nyungan status of Tangkic, see Evans (1995, 32–38).