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A Day in the Park: Emerging genre for readers of Aboriginal English

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Abstract: Despite the fact that varieties of Aboriginal English are widely used in communication in Aboriginal communities across Australia, the use of Aboriginal English in writing has been limited. A significant genre for Aboriginal writers has been the autobiographical narrative. In most published narratives of this genre, Aboriginal English has not been widely used. This paper describes and discusses an autobiographical narrative composed by Aboriginal author Glenys Collard and published by the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development in 2011 in which the only medium of narration (except for utterances by non-Aboriginal characters) is Aboriginal English. Analysis of this text supports the view that Aboriginal English as depicted in metropolitan Perth exhibits significant linguistic and stylistic continuity with Aboriginal discourse in more remote settings. It is suggested that writing for Aboriginal English readership entails the emergence of a distinctive genre.

Keywords: Aboriginal English; autobiographical narrative; Aboriginal writing

1. Introduction

It has been observed (Brewster 1996:7) that “[o]ne of the predominant genres ... of Aboriginal literature today is the autobiographical narrative”. Originating in the 1950s, such narratives tended to be focused on men, but increasingly since the late ‘70s, the leading authors have been women. Brewster observes that, in most cases, the production of such narratives involved an oral narrator and a non-Aboriginal collaborator. As she puts it: “Disinclined to take on the task of writing a whole book by themselves, and yet compelled to translate traditional knowledge from an oral into a written form in order to preserve it for future generations, Aboriginal oral historians and storytellers choose to collaborate with white scribes” (Brewster 1996:8).

Another way in which some Aboriginal women have enabled their oral narratives to appear in print is to narrate them in the original Aboriginal language and have them translated by Aboriginal English speakers into written Aboriginal English and published with associated art work (Crugnale 1996).

However, most English Aboriginal autobiographical narratives have been written, basically, in Australian English, though with occasional switches (even in the title, as in Glenys Ward’s *Unna You Fullas*) into Aboriginal English. In this way, especially since the appearance of Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, they have attracted a significant non-Aboriginal readership (Brewster 1996:15) both in Australia and internationally. They have not, however, significantly contributed to what Ngarritjan-Kessarar (Ngarritjan-Kessarar and Ford 2007:366) has referred to as the necessary process of *validating* Aboriginal speakers’ own dialect.

In an attempt to provide texts which *would* validate the dialect of Aboriginal speakers of English, for learners in both schools and training institutions, the Western Australian Department of Education and Training in 2005 commissioned the writing, illustrating and publication of a series of booklets written fully in Aboriginal English in association with the Department's project *The ABC of Two-way Literacy and Learning*. The series of booklets published between 2005 and 2011, while unified by a common theme of reminiscence and, in most cases, by dedications to family members, embraces a range of genres including recounts, tales of traditional life, observations of the natural environment and of people's connectedness with the environment, and song.

A Day in the Park, by Glenys Collard, which appeared in 2011, is the longest (40 pp. and 1500 words) and linguistically most complex of the booklets which have appeared. It is dedicated by the author to "my sisters and brothers who lived in the park with me" (Collard, 2011, p. 1), and her family members appear in photographs on the title page. This strengthens the sense of family ownership which underlies the story. The author wrote *A Day in the Park* from memory in one day. Its main characters are four girls aged 12-14 years old who, she says, would have been described as "juvenile delinquents." They had been members of the stolen generation and had spent periods living in an Aboriginal hostel, a receiving home, a foster home and a detention centre. They were, at the time depicted, living in East Perth, spending time in the park opposite the Aboriginal Advancement Council building and in the Claisebrook railway yards, and going to the river when they needed a wash.

In brief, the account begins with the girls in the park, but having to make a hasty departure when they see the car of the *demons* (plainclothes detectives) approaching. After a run, two of them find refuge in a railway crate. They share their recollection of how one of the boys stole a white woman's purse without her noticing. After a long walk, the girls find the boys sitting in the park with the adult men, handing on the money. The girls are hungry and one is given some money to go and buy something to eat. After they have eaten, the female detective, and later a *monartj* (uniformed police officer) approach and start asking questions. The girls and the boys respond evasively. As more detectives arrive, they escape by climbing trees. Eventually they come down and the police leave, after saying they will return the next day. The girls go to the river for a wash and, while they are drying themselves in the sun, talk about how they will spend the evening with a crowd of Nyungars in the city.

In her recent publication *Thinking and Speaking in Two Languages*, Aneta Pavlenko (2011:243) has observed that "the language of encoding is a stable property of autobiographic memories...Recalls appear to be more efficient, accurate, detailed and emotional in the language of encoding of the original event". It is, then, significant, that the author of *A Day in the Park* wrote from memory, in the language in which she had retained that memory, and with co-participants in the event in mind as among its potential readers. The document she has produced constitutes not only a cultural literary artefact, but also a valuable linguistic record by a native speaker of Aboriginal English evoking the variety of Aboriginal English used by Nyungars in Perth in the '70s.

My objective here is to provide an analysis of this document, first as a linguistic record – albeit a reconstruction, which, to a non-Aboriginal, though not to an Aboriginal reader, might be called "fictional" - contributing to the existing corpus of material on Aboriginal English, and second, as a cultural literary artefact, showing how writing for an Aboriginal English readership may contribute to generating a distinctive genre. I will also suggest that much of the distinctiveness of this writing is not limited to English but shows continuity with longstanding Aboriginal cultural traditions. As such, it may be compared with literature in

new Englishes in other cultures. It has been remarked, for example, of English in Zambia, that it “is now being used to perform communicative functions for which indigenous languages were used in the past and that speakers in practice appear not always to conceive of language boundaries in the ways that linguists do” (Moody 1986:295). It is interesting that Glenys Collard (pers. comm.) has referred to *A Day in the Park* as “a modern day hunting and gathering story”.

2. Linguistic Analysis

A Day in the Park is a rich source of supplementary data on the Aboriginal English of the south-west of Western Australia, at the period depicted. Although it is a written record, it affords a general view of the phonology of the dialect, since a system of orthography has been adopted (detailed in Königsberg, Collard and McHugh, 2012, Focus Area 8:51), which attempts to maintain the phonological features of the dialect while, in most respects, conforming to the conventions of written English.

2.1. Phonology

While the repertoire of vowels represented in the account is comparable to that in Australian English, the presence of the front, open vowel /a/ is particularly pervasive, as is the case in most Aboriginal languages (Dixon 2002:552) and, on the evidence of the spelling modifications in the text, it may, in some contexts, be preferred over

/ɛ/, as in “fullah/s” (pp. 3, 11, 17, 21 (x2), 27 and 29)

/ə/, in “fullah/s” (as above), “mighta” (p. 7) “dobba” (p. 27), “gotta” (pp. 29, 31, 37) “wanna” (p. 29) and “sorta” (p. 39)

/u/, in “ya” (p. 15)

/ou/, in “gunna” (pp. 3, 15), “Nah” (p. 25) and possibly “dunno” (p. 21).

/i/, in “unna” in, c.f. innit, (e.g. pp. 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 19, 27, 33, 35, 37 and 39).

The vowel in “been” may be perceived as losing its length, becoming “bin”, as in “we bin walkin an walkin” (p. 15)

“you say that I bin stoppin with you *fullahs*, unna” (p. 21),

but this does not occur in every occurrence, as shown in

“been ere a long, long time now” (p. 7).

It would seem that the repertoire of English vowels is comparable to that in Australian English, but that the prominence of /a/, and, perhaps, the creole-derived /bin/ form are being used as phonological markers of the dialect.

The unstressed vowel /ə/ and the syllables in which it occurs are frequently not pronounced:

dreclly ‘directly’ p. 11, 29

C'on ‘Come on’ p. 11, 13, 35 (x2), 37

cause ‘because’ p. 13, 23, 39

p'loney ‘polony’ [Bologna sausage] p. 19

proply ‘properly’ p. 19, 39

bout ‘about’ p. 25, 39

mess round ‘mess around’ p. 37

probly ‘probably’ p. 39.

The text also exhibits consonant substitutions, with regard to the usage represented in the standard spelling system, in particular:

Word-final /n/ is used in place of /ŋ/ in 39 occurrences, with 27 different words (all present participles except for “somethin” and “nothin”)

Word-final /p/ is substituted for /s/ in “yep” (p. 3)

Word-initial /d/ is substituted for /ð/ in “dere” (p. 17).

There are frequent cases of consonant elision, involving:

- initial /ð/ “em” for “them” (14 occurrences)
- initial /h/ “ere” for “here” (14 occurrences)
 - “e” for “he” (4 occurrences)
 - “im” for “him” (2 occurrences)
 - “ow” for “how” (p. 27)
 - “ome” for “home” (p. 29)
- final /s/ “yeah” for “yes” (p. 3)
- final /v/ “mighta got” for “might’ve got” (p. 7)
 - “woulda been” for “would’ve been” (p. 13)
 - “sorta dry” for “sort of dry” (p. 39).

Consonant clusters are frequently simplified:

- /nd/ to /n/ “an” for “and” (8 occurrences)
 - “roun” for “round” (4 occurrences)
- /nt/ to /n/ “aunny” for “aunty” (4 occurrences)
 - “dunno” for “don’t know” (p. 21)
 - “wanna” for “want to” (p. 31)
- /ld/ to /l/ “ol” for “old” (4 occurrences)
- /ktl/ to /kl/ “drecly” for “directly” (2 occurrences)
- /ts/ to /s/ “thas” for “that’s” (4 occurrences)
- /st/ to /s/ “jus” for “just” (7 occurrences)

There is also a distinctive use of prothesis, with /h/ being occasionally added before the vowel, as in *Johnny han em*, ‘Johnny and them’ (p. 9), *hit’s hot*, ‘it’s hot’ (p. 15) and *what han who*, ‘what and who’ (p. 39).

While many of the above occurrences would be unremarkable in Vernacular Australian English, some are distinctive and have been widely observed as markers of Aboriginal English in various parts of Australia (see, e.g. Malcolm 2008:136). Collard has used the distinctive spelling to reinforce the normality of their occurrence in the Aboriginal English speaking context.

2.2. Morphology

The morphology exhibited in the language used by the author and her characters covers a range of features of Aboriginal English, some shared by Australian English, some by Australian creoles, some by other non-standard Englishes and some apparently unique to this variety.

In listing the morphological and syntactic features, we shall note where the features are common to other dialects, as reported in the electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English (WAVE) (Kortmann and Lunkenheimer 2011), using the WAVE feature number and the percentage figure showing the level of attestation in the 74 varieties included in the atlas.

19 distinctive morphological features were observed in the text:

1. Noun phrase

- 1.1 regularized plural suffix on irregular noun (WAVE 48, 51%): *hungry mans* p. 17
- 1.2 noun plural marking optional (WAVE 58, 43%): *two bucks for bottle* [bottles]... p. 17
- 1.3 plural marking on Nyungar borrowing: *yorgas* p. 5
- 1.4 plural marking on 2nd pers. plural pronoun (WAVE 34, 91%): *yous* pp. 3, 31, 37
- 1.5 adjectival use of *us* in subject function (WAVE 28, 54%): *us four yorgas fell...* p. 5
- 1.6 adjectival use of demonstrative *them* in subject position (WAVE 29, 32%): *Lucky them big crates ere* p. 7 (10 occurrences)
- 1.7 dual personal pronoun form *them two* (WAVE 37, 12%): *them two they know all this place* p. 9
- 1.8 adjective form used with adverb function (WAVE 221, 92%): *wicked hard* p. 7 (8 occurrences)
- 1.9 no number distinction in reflexives (WAVE 14, 69%): *wash ourself* p. 33 (2 occurrences)
2. Verb phrase
 - 2.1 zero marking of 3rd person singular present (WAVE 170, 65%): *See what she want* p. 21 (3 occurrences)
 - 2.2 zero marking of past tense on regular verbs (WAVE 132, 58%): *Inny reckon to me...* ‘Inny told me...’, p. 11 (5 occurrences, all with *reckon*)
 - 2.3 regularization of past tense on irregular verbs (WAVE 128, 64%): *We all runned* p. 25
 - 2.4 past participle form for past tense (WAVE 131, 59%): *Last I seen...* p. 7
 - 2.5 past tense form for past perfect: *she never even knew they took it* p. 11
 - 2.6 present tense form for neutral future reference (WAVE 117, 31%): *...they be right* p. 9 (4 occurrences)
 - 2.7 *got* passive: *them girls mighta got picked up* p. 7
 - 2.8 invariant present tense form due to generalization of 3rd person –s (WAVE 171, 32%): *they’s too deadly* p. 9
 - 2.9 adverb of manner suffix –*way* (WAVE 219, 34%): *I was walkin slow way to her motorcar* p. 21 (2 occurrences)
 - 2.10 *was/were* generalization (WAVE 180, 53%): *we was all shoutin out loud...* p. 31 (4 occurrences)

There is, then, evidence of a comprehensive use of distinctive morphology. At least 16 (about 84%) of the items (those marked with WAVE feature numbers) are common to other English dialects or creoles. While some features such as *was/were* generalization (2.10) and adverbial use of adjective forms (1.8) are widespread across many varieties, others such as regularization of past tense and past participle of irregular verbs (2.3; 2.4), regularization of plural formation (1.1) and use of *us* in subject function (1.5) are most characteristic of other L1 English varieties, while others, such as the unmarked 3rd person present tense of verbs (2.1), unmarked past tense forms (2.2) and the use of the *-way* suffix on adverbs are clearly pidgin/creole-related.

The features observed include items common to Australian English or Vernacular Australian English (1.5, 1.6, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.9), items common to Kriol and/or Torres Strait Creole (1.2, 1.7, 1.9, 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 2.9), items common to both Australian Englishes and creoles (1.4, 1.8) and items representing other influence (1.1, 1.3, 2.5, 2.8). There is clear evidence here of the distinctive way in which Aboriginal English, as spoken in this context, has drawn on both English and non-English sources in the development of its morphology.

2.3 Syntax

35 distinctive syntactic features were observed in the text:

1. Nouns and Articles
 - 1.1 use of zero article where Standard Englishⁱ has definite article (WAVE 62, 57%) (4 occurrences)
an nex minute...Jonny walked past p.9
 - 1.2 use of zero article where Standard English has indefinite article (WAVE 63, 51%)
...she big dobba ‘she always reports on us’ p. 27
 - 1.3 use of demonstrative for definite article (WAVE 67, 41%) (3 occurrences)
*they took **that** purse* p. 9
 - 1.4 associative plural (WAVE 52, 66%) (2 occurrences)
Johnny an em p. 3
 - 1.5 ellipsis of noun after adjective
see with the blue on p. 21
2. Pronouns
 - 2.1 subject pronoun drop: dummy pronouns (WAVE 44, 39%) (2 occurrences)
How far now [is it] to go? p. 15
 - 2.2 subject pronoun drop: non-dummy pronoun (WAVE 43, 51%)
Aaay [I]wonder where Inny an em went p. 7
 - 2.3 resumptive pronoun (WAVE 194, 46%) (4 occurrences)
that big demon e was right behind em too p. 7
 - 2.4 zero dummy subject in existential clause (WAVE 173, 49%)
[There are] *More demons pullin up other side there* p. 25
3. Verbs
 - 3.1 zero auxiliary *be* before progressive (WAVE 174, 55%) (15 occurrences)
they comin this way p. 7
 - 3.2 zero auxiliary *be* before *gonna* (WAVE 175, 49%) (2 occurrences)
...where else you reckon they gonna be? p. 15
 - 3.3 zero copula *be* before NP (WAVE 176, 42%) (2 occurrences)
...she big dobba p. 27
 - 3.4 zero copula *be* before adjective phrase (WAVE 177, 53%) (12 occurrences)
She jus like her sisters p. 13
 - 3.5 zero copula *be* before locatives (WAVE 178, 47%) (3 occurrences)
she jus there p. 21
 - 3.6 zero auxiliary *have* (WAVE 179, 32%) (13 occurrences)
What she done now anyways? p. 29
 - 3.7 zero auxiliary *do* in wh- questions (WAVE 228, 69%) (6 occurrences)
Where you reckon them boys are? p. 13
 - 3.8 simple past for StE perfect (WAVE 99, 59%)
they got no shame p. 17
 - 3.9 double negative (WAVE 154, 82%) (3 occurrences)
Don't** say **nothin p. 3
 - 3.10 *not* as negator before gerund
*Aw come on, **not** talkin all the time* p. 15
 - 3.11 *never* as preverbal negator (WAVE 159, 81%) (2 occurrences)
*she **never** even knew* p. 11
 - 3.12 serial verbs: *go* (WAVE 149, 28%)
*lets **go find** em* ‘let’s go and find them’ p. 11
 - 3.13 confirmation eliciting tag *unna* (WAVE 165, 64%) (9 occurrences)

- They cruel ol too, unna* ‘They’re really old, too, aren’t they?’ p. 7
- 3.14 agreement eliciting tag *unna* (WAVE 165, 64%) (3 occurrences)
let’s go find em unna p. 11
- 3.15 subject/addressee included in imperative (WAVE 233, 41%) (11 occurrences)
Look out you fullahs p. 3; *You girls c’on* p. 35
- 3.16 addressee /addressee tag included in indicative (8 occurrences)
Girl my legs wicked sore p. 11; *We goin right down ere sister girl* p. 33
4. Adverbs
- 4.1 proximal marker *ere* (4 occurrences)
right next to us ere p. 3
- 4.2 distal marker *there*
More demons pullin up other side there p. 25
- 4.3 *like* as a focussing device (WAVE 234, 57%) (4 occurrences)
real slow way like p. 23
- 4.4 adverb in adjective position
We climbed right up the trees, right to the nearly top p. 25
5. Prepositions
- 5.1 omission of Standard English preposition *in* (WAVE 216, 70%)
We took off flat out all going [in] different ways p. 5
- 5.2 omission of Standard English preposition *of* (WAVE 216, 70%)
getting out [of] the motorcar p. 23
- 5.3 omission of Standard English preposition *on* (WAVE 216, 70%)
more demons pulling up [on the] other side there p. 25
6. Other
- 6.1 subject and verb/aux elision (4 occurrences)
[I’ll] *Meet yous at the big crates* p. 3
- 6.2 zero *if* in conditional clause
[If] *You want me, you come and get me then right* p. 25
- 6.3 tag question with *or what?* (3 occurrences)
You can hear me or what? p. 27

Of the 36 syntactic features observed in the text, 23 are common to other varieties of English (as indicated by the WAVE feature numbers). Twelve are also found in Australian Kriol and/or Torres Strait Creole (3.1, 3.13, 3.2, 3.4, 3.6, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 3.12, 3.5, 3.3, 3.15), but not other Australian Englishes, while only 5 are common to Australian English or Vernacular Australian English (3.14, 1.4, 2.3, 4.3, 3.8). Another six are found in both Australian English and/or Australian Vernacular English and Australian Kriol and/or Torres Strait Creole (3.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 3.12, 2.1), while twelve are features not represented in the WAVE atlas (4.1, 4.2, 3.16, 6.1, 3.10, 1.5, 4.4, 6.2, 6.3) and may be idiolectal or stylistic features of the author, or innovations within the south-west Aboriginal speech community of Western Australia.

It is significant that this text representing the speech of Aboriginal people living in the city relates more distinctively to other Aboriginal varieties than to Australian English varieties. This would strengthen the view that Aboriginal English is the product of a speech community which is distinct from that which has produced Australian English and that its use is not restricted to rural or remote communities.

2.4 Lexis and Semantics

The text draws on a range of lexical sources, both English and non-English, and where it uses English lexis it is often with semantic shift.

There are 12 items of Nyungar origin, some modified with English morphology:

- yorgas* ‘females’ pp. 5, 33
- yorks* ‘females’ p. 37
- kwon* ‘backside’ p. 7
- choo* ‘aghast, shame, oh no, trepidation, anxiety, unfamiliarity, fear’ p. 7
- nyorn* ‘expression of sympathy’ pp. 7, 11
- monartj* uniformed policeman (‘cockatoo’: “The dark uniforms with the peaked caps once worn by the West Australian police probably gave rise to this name” [Arthur 1996:160])
 - the monartj* pp. 9, 31
 - the monartj woman*, pp. 23, 31
- boya* ‘money’ *You save us some boya* (from ‘trading rocks’) p. 17
- neh, neh* [or *ney, ney*] /nɛ nɛ/ ‘stop, listen’ p. 5
- Balay* ‘expression of warning’ p. 25
- Aaay* ‘Hey’ (possibly derived, at least in part, from *Balay*) pp. 3, 21, 27, 31
- Nyungar* ...*biggest mob of Nyungars be in town tonight...* p. 37
- djerupin* [in this context] ‘excited/excitable’ *We was djerupin proply* p. 39

There are 14 items relatable to pidgin/creole sources. Many of these items are also found in other varieties of Aboriginal English spoken in non-remote areas. It is not suggested that the pidgin/creole influence is contemporary.

- you fullahs*, derived from *yupella* (creole) (WAVE 34), pp. 3, 21x2
- fullah/s*, derived from *you fullahs/yupella* and preceded by an adjective, e.g. *big, young* (pp. 11, 27) or a pronoun, e.g. *them* (p. 29)
- wadjela*, ‘whitefellow’, used as noun (p. 27) or adjective (pp. 9, 21, 23)
- too*, intensifier, ‘very’, derived from creole *tu, tumas* (WAVE 222), pp. 9, 39)
- biggest*, intensifier, ‘very big’, derived from Kriol *bigis* (Lee 1994), p. 31 (x2)
- big mob*, ‘a lot’ derived from Kriol *big mob*, ‘many, much’ (Lee 1994), p. 7
- drekli*, ‘soon’, derived from Kriol *dregli*, ‘directly, soon, immediately’ (Lee 1994), pp. 11, 29, 39)
- reckon*, ‘say, report, think’ derived from Kriol *reken*, ‘report’ (Lee 1994), pp. 11, 23, 35
- motorcar*, ‘car’, derived from Kriol *modiga* (Lee 1994), pp. 21 (x2), 25
- sang out*, ‘called out’, derived from Kriol *singat*, ‘sing out, shout’ (Lee 1994), p. 25)
- mob*, ‘crowd, relations’, derived from Kriol *mob* ‘crowd, extended family’ (Lee 1994), pp. 31, 37
- lovely*, ‘very good’, derived from Kriol *labli*, ‘nice’ (Lee 1994), p. 37
- deadly*, ‘enjoyable’, derived from Kriol *dedli*, ‘excellent’ (Lee 1994), p. 39
- one time*, ‘once’, derived from Kriol *wantaim*, ‘once’ (Lee 1994), p. 7

There are at least 18 English items exhibiting semantic shift:

demons, 'plain clothes detectives' pp. 3, 7, 25, 31
took off, 'started moving' (extension from motor to human), pp. 5, 11
fell into, 'dived into' p. 5
fall round, 'run/fly around' p. 11
cruel, intensifier, pp. 7, 13, 17, 31 (x2), 39
wicked, intensifier, pp. 7, 11, 13
wicked, 'enjoyable', p. 39
a feed, 'a meal', p. 11
open [*right up*], pp. 11, 13, 39, 'exhausted'
big [of a human], 'tall', pp. 13, 17, 25, 31
narrow[of a human], 'skinny', p. 13
oldies, 'older people', pp. 13, 15, 19
ol boy, 'older man' [without disrespect], p. 17
hungry, [of a man] 'cocky', p. 17
shame, 'respect [for elders]' pp. 17, 27
blocked, 'filled up' [in relation to eating], p. 19
hit, 'reached', p. 25
sister [*girl*], female friend of a female, pp. 13, 27

In addition, there are a number of non-standard English usages : *lay*, 'lie' (p. 7); *layin*, 'lying' (pp. 27, 39), and distinctive collocations or usages: *my mum's brother*, 'my uncle' (p. 31), *woman-headed*, 'precocious' (p. 27), *smellin ourself* 'sleeping' (p. 39) and *mighte* 'possibly might' (pp. 3, 23, 37).

The lexis of the text shows the clear relationship of Aboriginal English as spoken in Perth to the Nyungar language, but its even stronger links to pidgin-creole antecedents and to Aboriginal usage across Australia.

2. 5 Some Features of Discourse and Pragmatics

The theme of *A Day in the Park*, according to its author, is "survival". It traces the experiences of its four female protagonists through four episodes:

1. Escaping the *demons*
2. Finding the boys
3. Interacting with the adults (*demons*, *monartj* and *oldies*)
4. Washing and drying off.

Rather than taking one complication and moving towards its resolution, the account moves through multiple complexities and reaches, for its characters, the state of survival of another day. It has been observed that "speakers from different subcultural backgrounds use different principles to relate topics to each other in discourse" (Cheshire and Trudgill 1989:103). In this case, the progression of the narrative is neither chronological in the linear sense nor topical. It seems the main impulse that drives the account forward is the dialogue between the girls – dialogue which incorporates key recurring elements of observing the environment, making inferences, proposing action, taking action and reflecting. There is a sense that we are observing a recurrent cycle of activity and that the main principle being followed is the demonstration of ongoing mutual group concern.

Fundamental to the structure of *A Day in the Park* is the use of what I have called elsewhere *direct speech switching* (Malcolm 1994:294; 2002:29; 2009:9), whereby the narrator frequently yields the floor to the characters who continue the story by their dialogue without

interruption. In fact, *A Day in the Park* opens with a dramatic sequence of this nature, and proceeds by way of dramatic sequences briefly interspersed with narrative sequences. In all, the story is told in 17 dramatic and 12 narrative sequences.

Both the narrator and the majority of the participants in the dialogues are the girls on whom the story focuses. 42 of the 55 dramatic, or dialogue, sequences are between the girls, and of the remainder, all but one (which involves a woman addressing other women) involve one or more of the girls in interaction with either boys, *demons* or a woman.

Analysing the 55 speech acts in the dramatic, or dialogue, sequences, we find they exhibit five main functions:

1. Announcing
 - a) Announcing observation, e.g. *Look out you fullahs...the demons cruizin round this way*
(8 occurrences)
 - b) Announcing inference, e.g. *Aaay, they mighte lookin for Johnny an em unna*
(5 occurrences)
 - c) Announcing intended action, e.g. *I'm off you girls...*
(2 occurrences)
2. Eliciting
 - a) Eliciting observation, e.g. *Aaay wonder where Inny an em went*
(2 occurrences)
 - b) Eliciting inference, e.g. *Well, where you reckon, where else you reckon they gunna be?*
(4 occurrences)
 - c) Eliciting information, e.g. *Where are you living now Gail?*
(5 occurrences)
3. Requesting
 - a) Requesting action, e.g. *Ere big girl...get some p'loney and chips for us, unna.*
(10 occurrences)
 - b) Requesting attention, e.g. *Gail. Gail. Gail, I would like to speak to you please.*
(1 occurrence)
4. Suggesting
 - a) Suggesting action, e.g. *Aunny, Aunny you say that I bin stopping with you fullahs, unna.*
(6 occurrences)
 - b) Suggesting inference, e.g. *They be down the park with the oldies...you reckon?*
(2 occurrences)
5. Sharing
 - a) Sharing information, e.g. *We gotta go to the funeral bub...*
(5 occurrences)
 - b) Sharing reflection, e.g. *One time a big mob of us slept in there...*
(3 occurrences).

The speech act functions exhibited in the interactions show that speech is used primarily among the Aboriginal interactants to support the group life. There is a strong emphasis on observation and on making inferences from one's observations as a guide to action. It is fundamental that all observations are reported to the group, hence the "announcing" function. Members of the group announce what they have observed, the inferences they draw from their observations, and the action they intend for themselves and for other group members.

They also use eliciting and suggesting acts to encourage other members of the group to observe and to draw inferences from their observations.

There is much that is consistent here with findings reported on other data from Aboriginal interactions. Sansom (1980), in his ethnographic study of communication in a camp out of Darwin, noted the relevance of “witnessing”. This corresponds to what I am referring to here as *observation*. In the analysis of schemas underlying a corpus of Aboriginal oral narratives gathered in the Yamatji lands of Western Australia, Malcolm and Rochecouste (2000) found “observing” to be prominent. On the basis of induction from extensive work in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal working groups focused on Aboriginal English texts, I proposed in 2002 that Aboriginal English oral narratives tended to be guided by four norms of language use:

“Represent life as *action*, not existence.

Observe carefully and report observations discretely.

Verbalize only what cannot be assumed or inferred from the context.

Include the other person/s” (Malcolm 2002:27).

Later, in a study of 80 narratives by Aboriginal language and Aboriginal English speakers from across Australia, I observed, among other things:

“the pervasive presence, in interpersonal dialogue, of speech acts with the function of announcing observations, inferences, impending actions or intention” (Malcolm 2009:7).

The concept of “announcing” has been widely reported from other parts of Australia, sometimes under the term “broadcast speech” (Walsh 1991) or “broadcast address” (Reeders 2008:107).

2.6 Style

The representation of interaction in *A Day in the Park* has a number of stylistic features which have the effect of foregrounding the addressees and the illocutionary force of the utterances. Very frequently an utterance carries the intended receiver as a vocative tag:

“Look out **you fullahs**” 3/1

“I’m off **you girls**” 3/4

“Lucky e couldn’t climb that fence **sister**...” 13/1

“Aaay wait dere **girl**...” 17/8 (c.f. 7/7; 15/7)

“We gotta go to the funeral **bub**” 31/7 (aunt speaking)

“We goin right down ere **sister girl**” 33/4

“Don’t go drinkin too much **you yorks**...” ‘don’t drink too much, you girls’ 37/5

“we’ll have a wicked time, unna, **budda**...” 39/4 ‘we’ll have a great time, won’t we, brother...’

Alternatively, the utterance may be fronted with the intended recipient:

“**Girl** my legs wicked sore” 11/8

“**You girls** c’on” 35/5,

and in one case the utterance is preceded and followed by the recipient:

“**Sally** we gotta meet all them mob there **girl**” 29/5,6.

Where confirmation or agreement is sought, especially when a request for action has been made, a confirmation- or agreement- requesting tag is often employed:

“we don’t know nothing, **right?**” 3/5 (c.f. 23/6)

“they mighte lookin for Johnny an em, **unna**” 3/2 (c.f. 7/8)

“jus roun this corner ere, **OK**” 15/7

Tags are also used to form, or to emphasize the force of, questions:

“They be down the park with the oldies...**you reckon?**” 13/9
“We *cruel* hungry...price for a feed *budda*, **unna.**” 17/7 (c.f. 27/2,3; 37/8)
“you wanna go with them fullahs **or what?**” 29/7 (c.f. 39/2)

There is also a tendency towards overstatement or hyperbole, with the use of extreme or superlative forms to provide emphasis:

“they **cruel** ol” ‘they’re very old’ 7/3 (c.f. 13/7; 17/7; 39/5,6)
“them boards **wicked** hard...” ‘those boards are awfully hard’ 7/5,6 (c.f. 13/6; 11/8)
“one time **a big mob of us** slept in there” ‘once quite a few of us slept in there’
7/5 “theys too **deadly** cause them two they know all this place more than the *monartj* does” 9/1,2 ‘they’re really smart because they know this place better than the police do’
“that big *fullah* **hurt** us. He made us open right up” ‘that big man made it hard for us. He exhausted us’ 11/8,9 (c.f. 31/10,11)
“we woulda been cryin **cruel**...” ‘we would have been really upset’ 13/2 (c.f. 31/4,5, 11)
“We **hit** them biggest trees in the park” 25/4 ‘We rushed to those big trees in the park’
“**biggest mob of Nyungars** be in town tonight sister” ‘lots of Nyungars will be in town tonight, sister’ 37/4
“we’ll have a **wicked** time” ‘we’ll have a great time’ 39/4
“tonight will be **too deadly**” ‘tonight will be so good!’ 39/6

Another stylistic feature, observed also in Aboriginal texts from other Australian locations (Malcolm 2009) is a characteristic use of the verb *reckon*, which can attribute either a thought, or an utterance, or both to the person being depicted:

“Inny **reckon** to me, Girl my legs wicked sore...” 11/8 (c.f. 23/2,3)
“Johnny **reckon**, Nah, not even.” 25/1
“Tracey **reckon** we got no clothes or soap” 35/1
“Shut up we **reckon**” 35/2.

3. Illustrations

It has been observed by Clunies-Ross (1983:22) that “for Aboriginal people, the landscape...functions as a mnemonic system of memory places, as almost every feature evokes an area of sacred knowledge and ritual process as well as being of immediate economic or geographical concern”. I would argue that the relevance of landscape continues for Aboriginal speakers even when it is essentially a cityscape. The author of *A Day in the Park* was insistent that every page of the text be accompanied by supportive illustrations. The illustrations in the text have the effect of supporting the schemas alluded to inexplicitly in the text. The illustrator took photographs of the original sites and computer-modified them, after which he overlaid on them pictures of the participants in the narrative drawn by Aboriginal girls. The effect links the vague but recognizable nature of the physical background with contemporary depictions of the human participants in the story. The author wanted the pictures to take the reader back in time to the occasion of the events being described. This is in keeping with her contention that Aboriginal yarns are based on fact rather than imagination.

4. Conclusion

A Day in the Park is, in one sense, a new departure in Aboriginal writing. Apart from providing a glossary, it makes no concessions to the non-Aboriginal reader. Nor does it comply with non-Aboriginal expectations with respect to the rhetorical structuring of its narrative. Its representation of action is cyclical rather than linear. It demotes the role of the narrator, allowing the participants in the narrative to speak for themselves, and it balances its linguistic inexplicitness with explicit visual support which is intended to be “read” alongside the words of the text.

On the other hand, *A Day in the Park* is not new at all, but is marked by remarkable continuities with Aboriginal tradition. An analysis of the language used shows that this narrative from metropolitan Perth has linguistic continuity with Aboriginal expression across the continent, and, in particular, with places where contact varieties are still fresh. It is living evidence of the fact that the historical antecedents of the Aboriginal English dialect still resonate within it, even in an urban context. It also embodies interactional patterns of longstanding currency in Aboriginal communities, which support group life, in which observation, inference and concerted action are of primary importance.

The publication of *A Day in the Park* is intended as an educational resource. It has the potential, if used wisely in a bi-dialectal programme, to facilitate access to literacy for the many Aboriginal people who approach Standard English with trepidation. It also has the potential to broaden the views of non-Aboriginal Australians on the profound way in which Aboriginal culture is embedded in the form of English which Aboriginal people are accessing across the country.

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ⁱ This use of the term 'Standard English' is in accordance with feature descriptions in the World Atlas of Varieties of English, in which 'Standard English' is recognised as "an abstraction" which "figures as no more than an implicit standard of comparison" (Kortmann and Schneider 2004:2).