Chapter 1
Introduction

1·1   Ngaanyatjarra, a dialect of Western Desert

Taking a strictly linguistic definition of language, Ngaanyatjarra is one of the dialects of the Western Desert language which, it has been estimated, was the largest in Australia. "Within the total Australian land area of about 3 million square miles it seems that the multi-tribe Western Desert language was largest both in terms of geographical extent—some 500,000 square miles—and also in number of speakers—perhaps 6,000" (Dixon 1980:18).

The Western Desert dialect chain extends from Kukatja spoken around Balgo Hills south of Halls Creek in north-eastern Western Australia, to Gugada previously spoken in central South Australia (see Map 1). It includes dialects whose names have become familiar to some of the wider Australian public, names such as Luritja, Mantjiltjarra, Mardudjara, Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaatjatjarra, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara.

Due to their isolation in some of the most inhospitable areas of Australia, most of these people still maintain a relatively traditional lifestyle, and some small groups retained a completely traditional lifestyle right up until the early 1960s. Therefore these dialects, which their speakers would prefer to call languages, are still used in these areas as the everyday medium of communication.

Although the Western Desert people formerly roamed the desert in small food-gathering groups, during the last few decades they became localised at missions and settlements (now known as Aboriginal communities). The Ngaanyatjarra people now live in the Ngaanyatjarra Aboriginal lands. There are eight Ngaanyatjarra speaking communities in that area, the largest of which is Warburton which lies between the Gibson and Great Victoria deserts about 330 kms west of the border of South Australia and the Northern Territory.

In the times before the establishment of the Warburton Mission in 1934, Ngaanyatjarra was spoken around Warburton and as far east as the Jameson Range. Ngaatjatjarra was spoken from the Jameson Range extending around to the Blackstone Range and also around the Rawlinson Ranges to the north, while Pitjantjatjara was spoken from Wingelinna in the Tomkinson Range and to the east and north east (see Map 2).

The names of these dialects are to some extent nick-names which were probably given to them by the neighbouring group. Pitjantjatjara means the language having the word *pitja* 'come', 'move along':

<div align="center">

Pitjantja-tjara
to come -having

</div>

This name served to distinguish the Pitjantjatjara from their near neighbours to the north and east, the Yankunytjatjara, who have the word *yankunytja* for 'go', 'move along'.

Because not only the Pitjantjatjara but also the Ngaatjatjarra and the Ngaanyatjarra have the word pitja meaning 'come', a further distinction is made on the basis of the word 'this'. Ngaanyatjarra has the word *ngaanya* for 'this' and Ngaatjatjarra has the word *ngaatja* for 'this', while Pitjantjatjara has the word *nyangatja* for 'this'. Thus we see that commonly used words became the basis of dialect names.

The differences between Ngaanyatjarra and Ngaatjatjarra[2] are very small and speakers of both dialects understand each other without difficulty. However, the differences between Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra are much greater and speakers of one or other of the dialects, who have not had much contact with speakers of the other, experience difficulties in communication when the topic moves beyond simple everyday matters.

Since a large number of Ngaatjatjarra and even some Pitjantjatjara lived at Warburton for quite long periods between 1935 and 1968, people who grew up at Warburton came to speak Ngaanyatjarra, which was the local dialect, even though their parents may have been Ngaatjatjarra or Pitjantjatjara. However, since the

formation of the newer communities, some of which are in Ngaatjatjarra or Pitjantjatjara country, children who may have spoken Ngaanyatjarra at Warburton have now begun to speak Ngaatjatjarra or Pitjantjatjara, whichever the case may be.

A list of published materials about the Ngaanyatjarra language may be found in the *References* section.

1.2   Discourse genre

1.2.1   Discourse

In recent years there has been a developing interest in the study of discourse, or the study of sentences within their context. However some of the chief practitioners of discourse studies have not provided a definition of discourse, but rather regarded it as a primitive. Joseph Grimes (1975:21) wrote as follows:

> Since 'discourse' is a primitive term in the notional system I build up in this book, it is obviously not possible to give a strict definition of it. Nevertheless, Pike's notion of discourse as a verbal behavioreme is a better starting point than any other I know of for communicating what a discourse is. Like any other behavioreme, it is recognized by the culture as an entity with a beginning and an ending, and has internal structure.

Robert E. Longacre who has led teams of his colleagues in the Summer Institute of Linguistics in periods of intensive study of discourse in various parts of the world (in particular, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Colombia) and written or edited a number of volumes on discourse analysis, seems to take the notion of discourse entirely for granted.

Halliday and Hasan (1976:1) provide a definition of text which bears some resemblance to what we can assume Grimes and Longacre understand by discourse:

> The word TEXT is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole.
>
> A text may be spoken or written, prose or verse, dialogue or monologue. It may be anything from a single proverb to a whole play, from a momentary cry for help to an all-day discussion on a committee.
>
> A text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size.

However my working definition of discourse is a large unit of speech, one which usually but not necessarily consists in turn of paragraphs, sentences, clauses, phrases and words. Such discourses may of course be either dialogues or monologues. The present study deals only with monologues, narrative and hortatory.

1.2.2   Genre

Of those writers and proponents of discourse study mentioned above, Longacre in particular has found it helpful to classify discourse into genre. The basic classification has been into four genre: narrative, procedural, expository and hortatory. Longacre (1976:199) states:

> Here I classify according to two broad parameters, succession and projection. Succession refers to chronological succession which is plus in regard to certain discourse genre but minus in regard to others. Projection refers to a feature which sets off procedural genre from narrative on the one hand, and hortatory genre from expository on the other hand. We may then form the proportion: procedural is to narrative as hortatory is to expository. Narrative discourse is rooted in real time; it recounts events supposed to have happened somewhere, whether in the real or in an imaginary world. What is recounted is considered to be accomplished. Procedural discourse tells us how something would be done whenever it happens to be done, or even how something was done whenever it happened to be done. It is in projected rather than in accomplished time. Likewise, while expository