

# Intonational encoding of given and accessible information: Deletion, deaccenting and downstepped pitch accents in Djambarrpuyŋu

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The omission of an accent on given information (or post-focally) is often reported to *not* occur in Australian Indigenous languages (e.g., in Bininj Kunwok (Bishop, 2002; Bishop & Fletcher, 2005); Dalabon (Fletcher, 2014); and Mawng (Singer, 2005; Fletcher, Stoakes, Singer & Loakes, 2016)). In contrast, Djambarrpuyŋu, another language of northern Australia, *does* appear to use deaccenting as a strategy to encode given and accessible information. Thus, it does not conform to the areal typology of accenting all content words but does agree with deaccenting patterns commonly observed cross-linguistically (see, e.g., Büring, 2016; Ladd, 2008). This paper examines deaccenting, downstepping, and deletion in Djambarrpuyŋu.

Unlike the lack of deaccenting observed for Australian languages, it is frequently found cross-linguistically that a repeated word or information that is available situationally or inferentially is deaccented (Büring, 2016; Baumann & Grice, 2006; Ladd, 2008). Similarly, deaccenting or the extreme compression of pitch accents is very common for words in post-focal position in languages that make use of intonational accenting (Büring, 2016). However, for languages that do not necessarily deaccent, different strategies are employed to encode post-focal, given or accessible information. A well-known example is Italian that makes use of different pitch accents (D’Imperio, 2001), as well as the varying of gradient features such as pitch range and scaling (Swerts, Avesani & Kraemer, 1999; Swerts, Kraemer & Avesani, 2002).

This paper presents preliminary findings on how given and accessible information are prosodically encoded by nine Djambarrpuyŋu speakers from Milingimbi (Yurrwi), a community in northeast Arnhem Land, Australia. Data were elicited using two staged dialogue tasks concerning the naming of birds and identifying their moiety<sup>1</sup> in which information status of elements was deliberately manipulated. Utterances were transcribed in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2019) with an associated Autosegmental-Metrical model annotation of intonation (Beckman & Ayers 1997; Ladd, 2008). An EMU-SDMS database was created (Winkelmann, Harrington & Jänsch, 2017), allowing for complex querying and analysis of the data in R (R Core Team, 2018).

These data show that Djambarrpuyŋu speakers use a range of strategies to encode given and accessible information including deletion, deaccenting, and downstepped pitch accents. Figure 1 and Figure 2 give examples of deaccenting (Fig. 1) and downstepping (Fig. 2). Repeated information (i.e., thematic topics) in post-focal position is encoded differently by speakers, with some choosing to entirely delete given information—“...the most radical form of deaccenting” (Büring, 2016:289)—while others opt for a deaccenting strategy (e.g., Fig. 1). When information is accessible due to being a superordinate expression following a subordinate expression, it is deaccented in 75% of utterances (77/102). However, deaccenting is not always used; some speakers instead opt for a downstepped !H\* (e.g., Fig. 2). In some pre-focal environments, however, thematic topics are pitch accented (e.g., *gurrumatjiny* in Fig. 2).

Therefore, it appears that, unlike for other Australian languages, deaccenting is one of the strategies used by Djambarrpuyŋu speakers to encode accessible or given information. It may be that Djambarrpuyŋu simply has a different intonational profile than the previously described languages; work on the intonational phonology of Djambarrpuyŋu is ongoing. Further investigations will include analysis of naturalistic speech data that, it is hoped, will reveal more about the strategies speakers use to encode aspects of information structure in Djambarrpuyŋu.

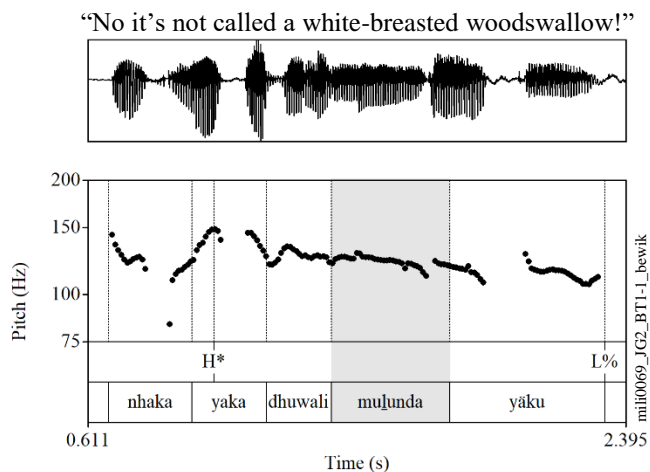


Figure 1: Example of deaccented *mulunda* “white-breasted woodswallow” when a thematic topic (i.e., repeated from preceding utterance).

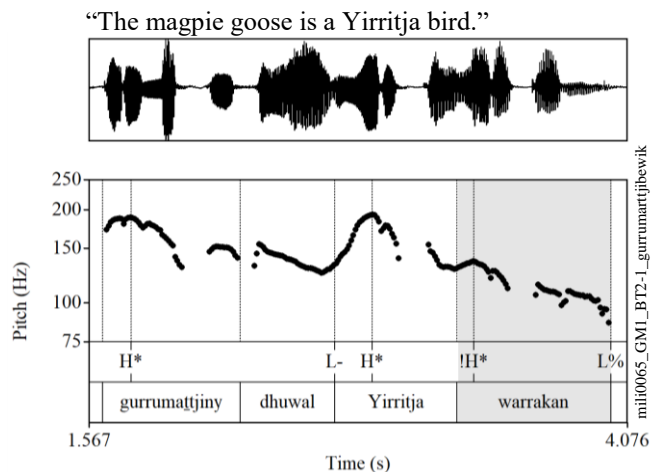


Figure 2: Example of downstepped *warrakan* “bird” when accessible information (i.e., preceded by subordinate expression *gurrumatjiny* “magpie goose”).

<sup>1</sup> Within Yolŋu (i.e., people of northeast Arnhem Land) culture, everything in the natural world, including languages, animals, areas of land, and so on, is divided into two groups; the exogamous patri-moiety of Dhuwa and Yirritja (Morphy, 1977).

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