

The study of person reference stands at the cross-roads of linguistics, anthropology and psychology. As one aspect of an ethnography of communication, this book deals with a single problem – how one knows who is being talked about in conversation – from a rich and varied ethnographic perspective. Through a combination of grammatical agreement and free pronouns, Bininj Gunwok possesses a pronominal system that, according to current theoretical accounts in linguistics, should facilitate clear cut reference. However, the descriptions of Bininj Gunwok conversation in this volume demonstrate that frequently a vast gulf lies between knowing that, say, an object is ‘3rd singular’, and actually knowing who it refers to. Achieving reference to people in Bininj Gunwok can involve a delicate and refined set of calculations which are part of a deliberate and artful way of speaking. Speakers draw on a diverse set of grammatical and lexical devices all underpinned by shared knowledge about a diverse range of social relationships and cultural practices.

“This book contributes to an enormous number of theoretically interesting debates in anthropology, linguistics and philosophy. Moreover, behind the entire narrative flows a truly staggering amount of raw cultural and linguistic expertise about Bininj Gunwok speaking peoples, which the author gained through more than a decade of intensive field research (and life experience) that would be the envy of any true ethnographer.”

John Haviland, *University of California, San Diego*

“This book will be a huge landmark for the unjustly neglected intersection of ethnography of communication, pragmatics and functionalist accounts of language use. It shows, with the convincing detail only available to those who have totally mastered a language’s full communicative palette, that in Bininj Gunwok enormous growths of lexical and grammatical machinery are dedicated to making reference opaque, in the most everyday of contexts. It is hard to think of a work of this scope that succeeds so well in achieving the goal of bringing the reader inside an alien communicative system and showing why it matters. On top of that, the book is bursting with evocative, surprising and often hilarious cameos’.”

Nicholas Evans, *Australian National University, Australia*

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11

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