Referring Expressions and Referential Practice
in Roper Kriol
(Northern Territory, Australia)

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Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in the preparing of this thesis, and all resources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature
Abstract

In this thesis I describe aspects of referring expressions and referential practice in an English-lexified creole language spoken in the Ngukurr Aboriginal community, in the Northern Territory of Australia. Kriol has substrate influences from seven traditional Aboriginal languages. Dialects of Kriol are spoken in Aboriginal communities across the Top End of Australia; with estimates suggesting more than 20,000 people speak it as a first language. The language has a low status and in many contexts, such as health, medical and legal contexts, it frequently goes unrecognised as a legitimate language requiring interpreters. There is no comprehensive grammar of Kriol and as yet, there have been few in-depth studies into its structure and use.

I investigate referential expressions in Kriol from various perspectives, using tools from a range of theoretical frameworks and research traditions, including descriptive linguistics, discourse analysis, information structure, and ethnopragmatics. The thesis provides an integrated description of how referential expressions are structured and how they are used in spontaneous talk to meet communicative needs. A further goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that there is significant continuity of referring strategies from Kriol’s Aboriginal substrate languages. The data used in this study consists of a corpus of spontaneous discourse between two or more speakers, elicited material, and consultation with Elders on cultural issues relevant to language use.

Chapter One provides an overview of Kriol, its speakers and the Ngukurr community. I discuss the development of Kriol; of particular significance is that it developed over a number of generations, enabling the possibility of continuity of cultural speech practices. Chapter Two provides a sketch of Kriol grammar, as well as an introduction to interactional style in Aboriginal languages. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the Kriol noun phrase, as well as possessive and inclusory pronominal constructions. Chapter Four draws on interactional data to describe the distribution and function of a determiner, *det*. Chapter Five examines clause-level phenomena involving referring expressions in Kriol using tools from the theory of information structure.
Chapter Six is a description of aspects of communicative practice in Kriol, in particular, person reference and information exchange.

Each chapter contributes original description of the Kriol language. By combining a number of theoretical perspectives, the thesis offers an integrated description of the structure and function of referring expressions.
Acknowledgements

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In loving memory of †Norma Nangala Joshua
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## Abbreviations and Symbols

1. **first person**  
2. **second person**  
3. **third person**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABIL</td>
<td>abilative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJ</td>
<td>adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLL</td>
<td>collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COM</td>
<td>complementiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>dative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEF</td>
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</tr>
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<td>DEM</td>
<td>demonstrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESID</td>
<td>desiderative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
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<td>exclamation</td>
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<td>exclusive</td>
</tr>
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<td>future</td>
</tr>
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<td>habitual</td>
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<tr>
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<td>instrumental</td>
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<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>intensifier</td>
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<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>intonation unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>divides components of a portmanteau morpheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>morpheme boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~</td>
<td>reduplication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>zero realisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>optional element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>ungrammatical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>uncertain grammaticality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>extended duration of previous vowel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discourse Transcription Abbreviations and Symbols

Found on examples with multiple speakers and two or more intonation units.

- truncated word
. final intonation
, continued intonation
? rising intonation (appeal)

(1.2) 1.2 second pause
... medium pause
.. short pause
1.B speaker B, first line of transcription
2.B speaker B, second line of transcription
<E E> distinct codeswitch to English
<X> indecipherable utterance, one syllable
<XX> indecipherable utterance, two syllables
<Q Q> quotation quality
<C C> creaky voice quality
<L L> lento, slow speech
<F F> forte, loud
<P P> soft
{text} word not included in original utterance, but necessary for free translation
CAPS capitalisation indicates emphasis
^ stress/emphasis
<(Hx)> exhalation
@ laughter