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On the road again: Displaying knowledge of place in multiparty conversations in the remote Australian outback



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ABSTRACT

In this article we examine displays of epistemic status and stance among long-term Anglo-Australian residents of remote communities through a case study of a 2-h interaction by four men who have demonstrated sophisticated knowledge of locations in their region. We show how equal access to knowledge of places is oriented to, as well as how differences in rights to authoritatively claim knowledge emerge in disputes over details of locations which are resolved when it is established that one member can provide more specific or up-to-date knowledge. This study not only contributes to understanding epistemic management practices in contexts where there is a high degree of shared knowledge, but also grounds the exploration of new insights into the ways in which the epistemics of referring to places appear to diverge from what has been described for referring to persons.

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1. Introduction

In this article, we describe in detail how participants in a multiparty conversation manage their epistemic status and stance, in a context where there is a shallow epistemic gradient between them due to their membership of a “small community”. We consider the effects of this shallow epistemic gradient on their turn design, and we examine how minor epistemic asymmetries and nuanced differences in epistemic rights are identified and managed. Because their conversation happens to revolve around roads and road travel within the vast area of topical relevance for these interactants, the data secondarily offer us an opportunity to examine closely how these speakers of Australian English refer to and talk about locations. The analysis demonstrates a striking degree of shared specific knowledge of the region the participants live and work in. This is particularly interesting given the dearth of interactional studies of place reference in non-urban English contexts, with existing studies on urban English suggesting a lack of specificity and accuracy in talk about place. The article therefore shows that detailed, accurate knowledge of place can form a “territory of knowledge” or “territory of information” (Kamio, 1994, 1995, 1997) shared by speakers of Australian English who are long-term residents of the remote regions of outback Australia. Further, it illustrates how these conversational participants sensitively orient to this

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shared knowledge as well as to subtle differences in their knowledge and experience in the ways in which they design their contributions to the conversation.

Our case study is a 2 h long, informal conversation recorded in 2018 between four men who have lived and worked for many years in the Kimberley, a remote region in the north of Western Australia. We suggest that the participants in this interaction belong to a “society of intimates” in Givón’s terms (Givón, 1979, 2005; Givón and Young, 2002), more broadly a “small community” in the parlance of this special issue. We ask whether and how living in such a community plays out in the ways in which people manage knowledge in conversation, and how this affects turn design.

The participants in the conversation considered here offer us an opportunity to begin considering how these remote Australians talk about the region they live in. Most research on the language of place in remote Australia has been done with Aboriginal people, and it has long been known that Aboriginal people living in remote communities in Australia can demonstrate extremely detailed and precise knowledge of place in their use of language, while many Aboriginal languages reflect the importance of place in their grammar (Haviland, 1998; Hoffman, 2019; Levinson and Wilkins, 2006).

In addition to describing the lexicogrammatical encoding of the semantics of location, research on Australian Aboriginal languages has also examined how reference to actual locations is established and maintained in remote contexts. As with other aspects of the construction of reference in interaction, claims have been made about the ways in which Aboriginal Australians design these references that are different from ‘mainstream’ Anglo Australia. But these cross-cultural claims tend to be based on assumptions about what Whitefellas¹ do, which have not been empirically grounded. Indeed, little systematic analysis of place reference by remote speakers of Australian English has been undertaken. Most research on the use of spatial language in English has been conducted in urban populations. In its consideration of reference to places, this article therefore also adds to a growing body of work on spatial language which aims to better understand the interacting effects of language, culture, and environment in explaining the way speakers talk about space. We find that it is strikingly different to what has been claimed for English speakers living in urban locations, aligning with recent sociotopographic approaches to spatial language which suggest that factors such as environment and occupation are important (e.g. Palmer et al., 2017).

We first briefly review existing work on speaker management of epistemic status and stance and how this can affect turn design, and on place reference in interaction and how it relates to speaker knowledge. Following that we introduce our data and explain how it was collected and analysed. We then discuss in detail two extracts from the conversation which show the extent to which shared knowledge is assumed as speakers make reference to locations in the course of relating incidents and expounding claims about the region. Finally, we turn to an examination of what happens when even minor epistemic asymmetries arise, amongst a group who otherwise align to one another as sharing relevant territories of knowledge to a high degree. We describe the ways in which these asymmetries are managed so as to both acknowledge differences in epistemic status based on differential experience, and preserve an overarching acceptance of the very shallow epistemic gradient which exists between these interactants.

2. Epistemics and place reference

Key early work by Clark (1996) on the establishment of common ground and Kamio (1994, 1995, 1997) on “territories of information” embody a focus on the ways in which interactants attend to the relationship between their own knowledge state and that of their addressees, and to how this may change and develop throughout an interaction. Within the framework of Conversation Analysis with its emphasis on naturalistic interaction, Heritage (2011, 2012, 2013) has drawn attention to the effect of both epistemic status (actual knowledge states of participants and how they differ from one another) and epistemic stance (how participants choose to represent their knowledge states) on action formation and other aspects of turn design. It is clear that management of knowledge asymmetries is a key organisational factor in conversation. While the focus of attention has been on differences in epistemic status and/or in epistemic stance, it is equally relevant to consider cases where there is a high degree of alignment in epistemic status and an apparent alignment of epistemic stance, as in the data considered here.

Such issues have been considered of particular consequence for the formulation of reference, giving rise, for example, to the HCRC Map Task project (Anderson et al., 1991), which sought to control for interlocutor knowledge in a route-drawing task so as to examine the influence of epistemic asymmetries on reference formulation and other aspects of the interaction. However, most research on territories of knowledge and formulation of reference has focused on reference to persons. For example, within Conversation Analysis, attention has been given to how references to persons are formulated so as to allow the addressee to quickly and straightforwardly recognise the intended referent (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1996): that is, speakers should use the most minimal form they can which will still enable the addressee to identify the intended referent – and recipients should disrupt the progressivity of the interaction as minimally as possible in acknowledging their recognition of it (Heritage, 2012). Research subsequent to Sacks and Schegloff’s (1979) pioneering work has identified a number of other candidate principles operating within person reference, such as a preference for association to current conversationalists in non-recognitional reference (Enfield and Stivers, 2012).

¹ This term is used by Aboriginal Australians to refer to non-Aboriginal people of European descent.

As [Enfield \(2012\)](#) points out, compared to research on person reference, interactionally focused research on reference in other ontological domains such as place is limited (p. 450). However there has been some recent attention given to choice within systems of spatial expressions to formulate place within conversational interaction ([Williams, 2017](#); [Dingemans et al., 2017](#); [Sicoli, 2016](#); [San Roque, 2016](#)). Place reference in interaction has been described as providing possible answers to “where” questions (cf. [Dingemans et al., 2017](#); [San Roque, 2016](#)). We cannot here answer the question of whether places exhibit the kinds of epistemic asymmetries that person references do (cf. [Raymond and Heritage, 2006](#)). The places referred to in the data we consider are not owned by the interlocutors, and are treated as in the public domain. As we show in this article however, there is a territorial sense of authority over knowledge about place, distinct from a personal sense of ownership.

In early work examining urban American English speakers, [Schegloff \(1972\)](#) explores “a series of considerations relevant to the selection of a locational formulation” (p 76). As with reference to persons, on any occasion on which reference to a location is made, the speaker chooses between a set of expressions which could possibly refer to that location. This choice will reflect calculations relevant to the sequential context of the interaction, including the need to design the reference so as to be understood by the interlocutor given the speaker’s apprehension of the recipient’s epistemic status relative to the location. Schegloff sees the set of considerations relevant to choice of a locational reference on any particular occasion as including the speaker’s analysis of the location of themselves, their co-conversationalists, and any entities being located, based on what he refers to as a “common sense geography” shared by speakers (p 85). This common sense geography is taken to include a shared assumption as to the appropriate level of granularity at which to refer to places (e.g. one can speak of returning to California or returning to America, and the choice will depend in part on an understanding of where one is returning from).

A second consideration is the speaker’s “membership category” analysis of the participants in the interaction, and the way in which this relates to estimation of the likely epistemic status of these participants, and any epistemic asymmetries between them with respect to their relevant knowledge of place. Speakers “treat the recognizability of particular names as variably distributed” (p 92). For place names, an important element of this distribution is related to people’s association with a territory - their territorially based category membership. As with other instances of reference, speakers therefore may make claims to recognizability of a particular locational reference by virtue of choosing to use it in context. “In this way, ‘right’ selection and adequate recognition of place formulations can be seen to be one basis for demonstrations of, claims to, failings in, decisions about, etc. the competent membership of either speaker or hearer.” ([Schegloff, 1972](#), p 93).

A recognitional place reference therefore is a place reference which is formulated in such a way as to display that the audience should be able to recognize the intended location and therefore resolve the reference; recognitional initial references to places can include a range of forms - names and descriptions - and may be accompanied by multimodal signalling such as use of pointing gestures.

Schegloff makes a number of claims in this 1972 article as to the typical practices for formulating place of the North American English speakers he is dealing with. He articulates a preference rule to the effect that if a speaker can use a relationally oriented locational expression (e.g. “Al’s house”, “the office”), they should do so (p 100), and also suggests that there is a preference for choice of place names as locational formulations (p 96). Both are preferred to geographical specification (such as addresses like “100 Rode Road”). Our data broadly bears out Schegloff’s claims, in that the speakers generally use highly minimal recognitional forms of reference for locations, including shortened forms of names and definite descriptions, providing more elaborate forms of reference only when needed due to epistemic asymmetries which become apparent among the participants.

In a later iteration of his work on referring to locations, [Schegloff \(1984\)](#) explores the ways in which references to place are accompanied by gestures, including points. He suggests that if the place referred to is visually accessible, the point will be in the accurate direction of the referent, but accuracy is not necessary if the place is not visually accessible, to the extent that speakers in a single conversation may refer to the same location but point in different directions without this causing problems. He notes: “The behaviour of recipients is compatible with this disengagement of gestures from ‘actual direction’; recipients of the talk rarely look in the direction to which the point is pointing in place-reference-related gestures” (p. 280). Speakers instead consistently use sectors of local space to set up and ongoingly indicate locations being referred to. These claims have been more recently supported in [Le Guen \(2011\)](#). The assumption here is that English speakers in the urban settings considered lack a sensitive awareness of their location and are either unable to accurately gesturally locate distant places relative to themselves, or consider it unimportant to do so.

As we show, the focus on urban settings in previous work is a limitation. The conversation we consider here offers an opportunity to begin to consider the ways in which locals living in small, remote and non-urban communities engage in talk about place and how the high informational homogeneity of these communities may affect this talk. Recent work has drawn attention to the importance of environmental and socio-cultural factors for the relationship between spatial knowledge and language (e.g. [Palmer, 2015](#); [Stirling, 2010](#)), as well as to the presence of speech community internal variation in knowledge and use of spatial language, related to such factors as generational change ([Meakins and Algy, 2016](#)) and occupational differences (e.g. [Le Guen, 2011](#); [Lum, 2018](#); [Palmer et al., 2017, 2018a, b](#)).

In line with this research, examining the way in which detailed knowledge of place affects turn design in the conversation considered here allows us to begin to compare place language usage of urban and remote area speakers of English.

3. Data and methodology

The work we report on here is part of the CIARA (Conversational Interaction in Aboriginal and Remote Australia) project. The overall aim of this project is to empirically investigate aspects of conversational style in both Aboriginal language communities and by remote Anglo-Australian speakers of English. The conversation considered here is part of a corpus of video-recorded multiparty interactions in English, between people who had been living in the Kimberley region of Western Australia for at least ten years and in many cases much longer. Fig. 1 shows the location of the Kimberley. The recordings were made in the townships of Kununurra, Halls Creek, Wyndham, and Broome. The corpus consists of video-recordings from 14 sessions, involving a total of 48 participants, a total of 17.5 h of interaction. In each case, groups of participants came together as the result of personal contact, and represent people who might in normal circumstances meet for a chat. They were recorded at a place of their choosing – normally a park or someone's house or yard – talking over refreshments. Two high quality video cameras were used to videorecord the scene, and lavalier microphones captured each participant's speech. The geolocation of the conversation was recorded using GPS, and the directional alignment of the cameras was recorded in degrees. The researchers remained close by but out of earshot of the conversation, and participants were not given any instructions about what to talk about. The research was conducted with ethics approval from Macquarie University and the University of Melbourne, and all participants gave their permission to be video-recorded and for screen shots and transcription extracts to be used in publication. The participants from the conversation discussed here chose to be referred to in extracts using their own names rather than pseudonyms.

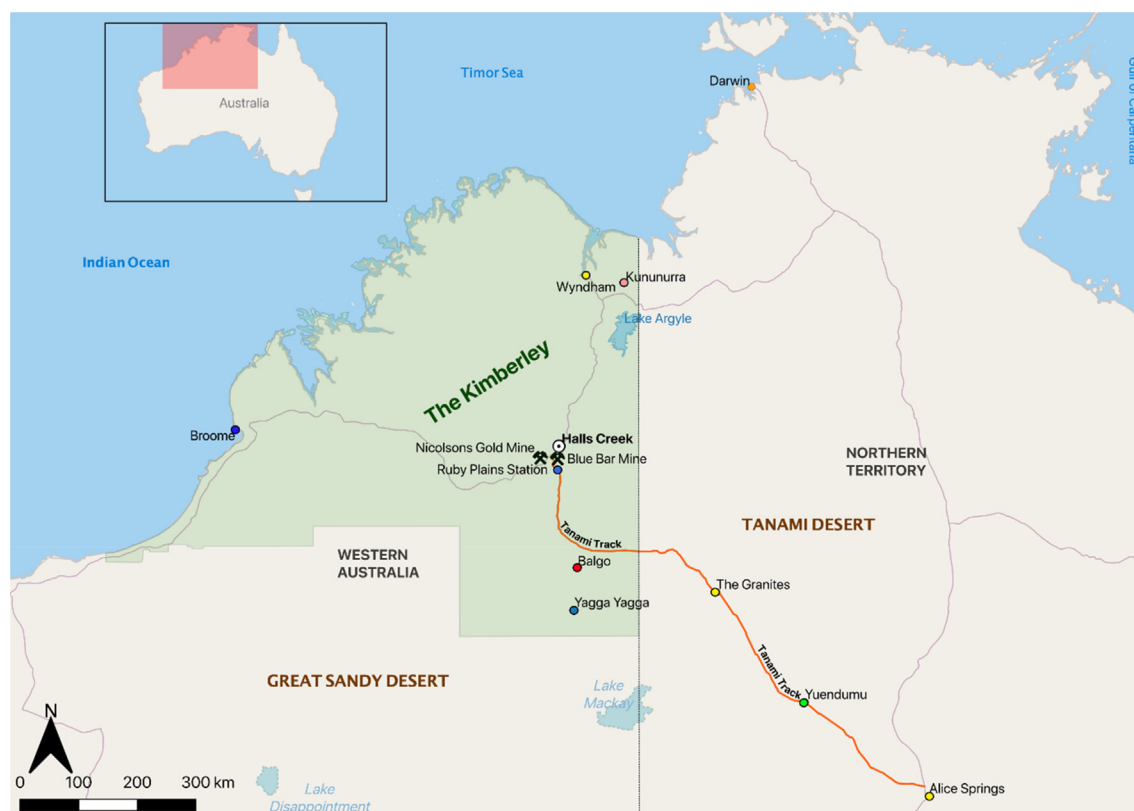


Fig. 1. The Kimberley and Tanami desert.

The conversation we focus on was recorded in the small town of Halls Creek. Fig. 2 is a screenshot showing the participants and their seating configuration. They are sitting outside in the yard at the property of one of the men. It is morning, and over the 2 h period of the conversation, morning tea is provided by the researchers.



Fig. 2. A screenshot of the participants (image used with permission).

The four men have all lived in remote north west Australia for many years, and have spent very significant amounts of time driving its roads. The topic of conversation over the first hour is almost entirely about remote area roads, their quality and how people should tackle driving on them over long distances. The Tanami Desert extends from the south east corner of the Kimberley through the centre of the Northern Territory (see Fig. 1). The Tanami Track, or Tanami Road, is a 1000 km dusty gravel road running between Halls Creek and Alice Springs, through the Tanami Desert (see Fig. 3). The Kimberley is around 430,000 sq kms in size, roughly the size of Sweden, and the Tanami Desert is 260,000 sq kms, slightly larger than the United Kingdom. Thus, the area our participants talk about is 700,000 sq km in size.



Fig. 3. The Tanami Track (Photo: Joe Blythe, 2015).

Our focus of analysis was the first hour of this conversation. In analysing parts of the interaction where location in place was specified, we drew on the methods and concepts of Conversation Analysis (e.g. Sidnell and Stivers, 2012). We took a

multimodal approach, identifying locational pointing where it accompanied place reference and considering other nonverbal aspects of the interaction such as eye gaze.² For each example in this collection, we considered aspects of turn design potentially relevant to the management of epistemic status and stance by the participants. As indicated in the Introduction to this special issue (Mushin, 2021), these can include action formulation, epistemic modification, reference formulation, and selection of response tokens.

Our analysis shows that the participants consistently formulate their contributions to represent themselves as participating in shared territories of knowledge about the broad region they live in, including detailed and specific knowledge about the area, its locations and its routes. The conversation includes stories about incidents linked to high stakes discussion of the need to “bitumise” – or seal with bitumen – major routes which are currently gravel or sand. These include descriptions of specific locations along roads, or specific bits of roads, and of routes taken. The men also speak of mines, cattle stations, creeks and other topographical features, and small communities.

For the most part, turns are designed without epistemic modification and using reference formulations conforming to the two competing preferences for recognition and minimal forms as observed for person reference (e.g. Sacks and Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1996; Enfield and Stivers, 2012). Major roads are referred to using definite NPs (“the Tanami”) as if proper names – sometimes just “Tanami”. Other places are all referred to using proper names or definite NPs, e.g. “the mine”; forms of reference designed to indicate that the referent should be identifiable to others in the context of the current talk. After reference is established, places are commonly referred to using minimal distal anaphoric “there” or for a part of a road, “that”. Place reference in this conversation operates at a coarse level of granularity – “zoomed out” (cf. Richter et al., 2013) – such that a wide area is up for grabs conversationally, and some of the roads referred to are long and/or far away from where the speakers are sitting. However some sequences designed to establish place refer to very precisely distinguished segments of roads.

The locations spoken about are not visually accessible from the place the men are sitting. However in contrast to the behaviour described for North American English speakers by Schegloff (1984) and Le Guen (2011), there is good evidence that the participants often use accurate pointing to accompany their place reference – this claim is elaborated in de Dear et al. (In press), which shows that this is true in different ways for both the remote area English speakers considered here and for Aboriginal conversationalists in the region. This accompaniment of verbal reference by accurate pointing is important as it underlines our argument that the speakers display a detailed, specific and accurate knowledge of the area they are speaking of.

In Section 4 we discuss cases largely representative of the conversation as a whole, which illustrate unproblematic uses of place reference, grounded in the participants’ shared territories of information. However, despite the consistent orientation to shared territories of knowledge, there are some instances where epistemic asymmetries give rise to negotiation over the details of spatio-temporal reference pertaining to local places. In Section 5, we turn to two examples where the participants identify a lack of alignment in their epistemic status. In each case, the participants exhibit a high degree of care to preserve the base line shallow epistemic gradient between them, through work to account for the discrepancies identified and situate them in the broader context of high alignment in both epistemic status and stance.

4. Shared knowledge of place

In Extract 1, we see a fragment of the interaction where the relevant common ground concerning the locations talked about is simply taken for granted by the participants. Turns are designed for a knowing audience, and responses from the recipients are minimal.³

Extract 1: That big mobile rig

```

1 Jamie:   w-That big- (0.8) ^that^ big mobile rig they (.)
           .....
           IF pt LFA to SE, fig.4
2 ~the:y uh; (0.4) th'light'n plant they took out tih
3 thuh Granites there; (0.8) (0.2) had missed the
           IF pt RFA Pt L,
4          turnoff.
           sweep IF
           front pt SE
5 (0.3) (0.3)
           -----
           IF to lips
6 Jamie:   It- (0.5) (0.3) they 'adda use two g- (0.2) gra:ders
           -----#
           IF pt RA to SEbe
           # Moves IF up and down
           d      d      d      d      d

```

² See de Dear et al. (In press) for details of the method by which we identified the directional vector of pointing gestures.

³ Transcription conventions are based on Hepburn and Bolden (2012) and Mondada (2013, 2018). Additional abbreviations used in transcription are given in the Glossary. Data from this project will ultimately be archived and interested parties should contact the researchers for information.

7 at Ru:by?
 -----#
 d
 8 (.)
 9 Jamie: tih pull it through **those** ^creeks?

 FH pt S, down and up
 10 (1.3)

 Holds
 FH pt
 11 Malcolm: ^Shit-^
 Jamie:
 RA to resting
 12 Jamie: It hundred 'n sixteen ty:res on ^it? (0.2) 'n it wa'

 three hundred tonne..
 13 (0.3) (0.7)
 14 Jamie:
 IF pt 45° RA SE
 15 (1.6)
 16 Jamie: M:assive: (0.3) big- (0.3) mobile generator.
 17 (0.7)
 18 Malcolm: Right,
 19 (0.6)
 20 Jamie: An' i' w's ^on this: (0.9) on this uh:m: (0.7) drop-
 21 deck- (0.9) °kh-m° (1.2) d:olly type thi:ngz (0.2)
 22 hun'red 'n' sixteen ty:res,
 23 (1.1)
 24 Jamie: an' behin' thuh cab uh thuh truck- (0.6) theh'v got-
 25 (.) they had this other u:nit- (.) the:re, (.)
 26 another mo:ter, (0.9) that they u:se:z (0.7) tih-
 27 (0.2) l:ift up thuh ty:res if they get a flat ty:re.
 28 (.)
 29 Jamie: Automatic'lly they- ·hhh (0.4) °·mmhn° (0.2)
 30 Malcolm: A:h oka[y].
 31 Jamie: [B't- (.) they lift 'em off thuh grou:n',=
 32 so yih c'n pull thuh ty:re off 'n' repla:ce ^itz
 33 (0.3)
 34 Malcolm: ~Yeh~
 35 (0.5)
 36 Jamie: Bu' when they got bushed, they w#ent past **the** turnoff
#.....
 RFA FlatHand front,
 37 an' they'd- (.) #tried tih tu#rn aroun' **in** fron' o'
#.....#.....
 #RA extend #RFA IF pt, left, up
 fwd, rt, and back fwd, rt, 60°
 Fl Hand down
 38 **the-** (0.4) # (1.0) **fron' o' the t-** #**house at Tanami**
#.....#.....
 retract RFA FH pt SE
 39 **there**z

 40 (0.9)

This extract is from early in the conversation, before Warren arrives, so there are only three interlocutors present. In line 1, Jamie starts telling a story with a reference to a mobile rig - a lighting plant - which he introduces with a somewhat dysfluent and complex recognitional reference, reformulated in process.⁴ He sets up the transport of the rig as relevant to the story (“they took out tih”). He uses the proper name “The Granites” to locate the rig at a mine near a local landmark next to the Tanami Track in the Northern Territory (“The Granites Gold Mine” in an area called “The Granites”) - across the state border about 400 km from where they are talking. This is accompanied with the distal deictic “there”. Both “the Granites” and “there” are designed to introduce a location known to the other participants. As Jamie starts to talk, he also produces an index finger point to the left, which is to the South-East and therefore a very accurate indication of the actual direction of the mine from

⁴ Note that silences of up to 1 s or even longer are not uncommon in this conversation and are not reacted to by addressees as indicators of trouble.

where they are sitting, and he also looks left (Fig. 4).⁵ These recognitional referring expressions and the accompanying gesture effectively establish the location and identity of the rig about which he is going to tell a story.



Fig. 4. At line 1 of Extract 1 Jamie produces an accurate gaze and index finger point to the SE (combined views from the two cameras are shown here) (images used with permission).

Lines 3–4 then provide what is essentially an abstract for the story: the mobile rig taking the lighting plant to the Granites had missed “the turnoff”, with a further recognitional used assuming the audience can identify which turnoff is intended.⁶ Throughout Jamie continues to point in roughly the same direction, which is 45° to his left, and to the SE of where they are seated.

In lines 6–9, Jamie provides a piece of evidence for the unusual weight of the rig by stating that two graders⁷ were used to pull it through creeks at Ruby Plains (Cattle) Station, which is situated on the Tanami Track about 57 kms from Hall’s Creek, on the way to the Granites. He produces an accurate point to the Station across his body towards the South-East-by-East before making reference to it using a minimal form, “Ruby”. He also uses a recognitional demonstrative to refer to “those creeks”, assumed to be located at Ruby Plains station, and he produces an iconic up and down movement of his flat hand, as he points South-East, indicating the movement of the rig through the creeks. In doing so he invokes his audience’s knowledge of the terrain and of what it is like to move through it – he doesn’t explicitly refer to this or account for his gesture, the up and down gesture simply evokes the idea of creeks as crossings and the assumption that a vehicle will move down towards the creek bed from the bank on one side and up again on the other.

During this extract so far, Jamie’s bodily position is slightly oriented towards Malcolm, and it is clear that participant roles are not equal in this part of the conversation – Malcolm is established as the primary story recipient through Jamie’s bodily orientation to him and through his own engagement with Jamie’s story. Dave, who is also present, remains visibly disengaged, gazing away from Jamie throughout this part of the conversation.

Although there is a 1.3 s silence before Malcolm’s verbal response to Jamie’s comment about the two graders, at 0.4 s after Jamie’s turn, Malcolm starts to move his body back, pulls a frown, and then finally in line 11 produces the assessment “shit” with high pitch. This is plausibly a response to the idea that two graders were needed, and so is aligned with Jamie’s epistemic and affective stance. It shows that Malcolm shares Jamie’s knowledge that having to use two graders to pull a rig is unusual and therefore the remarkable fact here.

Jamie then provides an elaborated account of why two graders were needed, supporting Malcolm’s assessment (“shit”), with a physical description of the rig including its weight (300 tonnes) and how many tyres were needed to support that (116 tyres), accompanied by iconic gestures depicting the object. Malcolm responds to this in line 18 with the epistemic token “right” (Gardner, 2007) and then later after further informings from Jamie about the nature of the rig, its motors and its 116 tyres, with “ah okay” (line 30) – a change-of-state token “ah” followed by “okay” registering the

⁵ In this case the point is within 1 degree of the actual vector of the target location from where the participants are seated. In de Dear et al. (In press) we further describe the methodology we use to establish vectors and discuss in detail the general degree of accuracy of locational pointing within this conversation. A more detailed analysis of the relationship between pointing gestures and recognitional and non-recognitional referring expressions remains for another study.

⁶ In context this could be the turnoff from the Great Northern Highway which runs through Halls Creek, onto the Tanami Track – the turnoff being situated approximately 16 kms out of town. The audience would know that if something was being taken to The Granites on the Tanami Track, it would need to turn off from the Great Northern Highway down the start of the Tanami Highway out of the Halls Creek. Alternatively, it could be a turnoff from the Tanami Track to the gold mine, given that a house is referred to and there are no houses at the turnoff from the Great Northern Highway.

⁷ A road grader is a heavy, wheeled machine with a blade used to level the ground in making or maintaining gravel roads.

adequacy of Jamie's explanation of how they change the tyres on such a rig, that thereby indicates an equalisation of epistemic status.

In the *but*-prefaced turn in line 36, Jamie returns to the story, telling how the driver missed the turnoff, tried to turn around, and got stuck. He again uses a definite NP to refer to “the turnoff” and a further reference to “in *f*ron' o'the- (1.4) fron' o' the t- #house at Tanami there;”, accompanied again by a flat hand point to the South-East, as the place where the truck had tried to turn around. The name “Tanami” is not a unique identifier as it could in principle refer to a number of locations within the same general area - a small community (near the Granites mine), the Tanami Downs Station situated further along the road, the Tanami Track itself, or the Tanami Desert. Here it seems likely that the intended location is the community, where there are some but not many buildings. The location of the house is here anchoring the event of the truck attempting to turn. Again there is no interaction over the establishment of the location and no dispute or confusion: Jamie formulates his referring expressions to the location to position Malcolm as a knowing recipient, with equivalent epistemic status to himself - Malcolm will understand which house he is referring to and will know what things look like at the turnoff.

An interesting point throughout is that Malcolm, as primary recipient, gazes at Jamie but produces very little in the way of verbal response or facial expression, with just a few response tokens to keep the story going. In particular, he does not react to any of the place formulations as at all problematic. Although the very specific location Jamie is talking about where the rig had the mishap is hundreds of kilometres away, Jamie's place references have not required repair. This example thus illustrates a shallow (or level) epistemic gradient between Jamie and Malcolm with respect to these locations, manifested in the minimal design of the references to place.

Extract 2 below also illustrates shared knowledge of place by the participants, but is different from Extract 1 in that it involves them actively aligning with the speaker to display and lay claim to the shared knowledge. This extract deals with the topic of the state of repair of the Tanami Track and in particular, of specific sections of it which the participants identify for each other. The point of this part of the conversation is that with the potential development of the new mine, the roads on the route between the lake and the port would need to be upgraded to take the large number of heavy trucks transporting the potash. The participants strongly align with Malcolm's point here.

Extract 2: Fifteen quads a day

- 1 Malcolm: An' then you've- (0.2) then you %g#ot# Lake#%
#--#.....#
LFA to face, M adjusts glasses IF pt 70° ca W
 %.....%
Dave: Moves sitting
- 2 #Macka:y# comin' on- (.) on no:w,=
Malcolm: #,,,,,,#
Dave: %.....%
position to left to face Malcolm
- 3 Jamie: Yea:h.%
 4 (0.4)
Dave: %.....%
- 5 Malcolm: %U:h:m% (0.3) kghm they've got potash;=sulphate
Dave: %.....%
- 6 potash;
 7 (0.8)
- 8 Malcolm: They're talkin' abou:t ^fiftee:n qua:d roadtrains
 9 a day.
 10 (0.5)
 #...#
IF LFA pt vertical

- 11 Malcolm: #comin' # th:rough from th' Lake Macka:y # through
 #.....#-----#.....
IF pt 50° front
((Malcolm does points in front of his body, to W))
- 12 **Yagga Yagga.**

Hand towards
face ca 20cm
IF 'wiggle'
- 13 Jamie: Yeh [yeh yeh.
Malcolm: -----
Hold hand steady
front of face
- 14 Malcolm: [(hafta do) # **thuh road** up through ^Balgo,
 -----#.....
Hold hand Hand retract to left of face
front of face
- 15 (0.35)#(0.25) an' onduh **thuh Tanami**# induh **Wyndham**.
 -----#.....#.....#
Hand fwd, rolls left WH pt Flicks H rt to
pt L shoulder
- 16 (0.6)
- 17 Jamie: Yeah ^right
- 18 (0.6)
- 19 Malcolm: Fifteen quads a day;=^imagine thee amound uh
 20 traffic on **that fuckin' road**.^
- 21 (0.2)
- 22 Jamie: Yea:h I know. 'hh an' thuh thing i:[s thee-
- 23 Malcolm: [An' that's why
 24 we're talkin' about bitumizing. (.) there were jus'
 25 (.) [°(uh yih know,)°

- 26 Jamie: [The wo:rst part uh- (0.4) (0.2) [once- once-
- 27 Dave: [Yeh-
- Single nod*
- Gaze to Malcolm*
- 28 Malcolm: [Needs tih be
- 29 bitumized **that road**;=wi' th' amoun' uh trucks and
- 30 traf[fic.
- 31 Jamie: [A:h y' ^have^ to.=b't w- thuh ^worst^ part
- 32 about it is **thi&s (0.3) fordy kay out tih ^Ru:by&.**=
- &.....&*
- RA IF pt 50° S across body to left*
- 33 Malcolm: =Yeah.
- 34 (0.7)
- 35 Jamie: That's a big- (.) °mhmn-° tha's- thass-
- 36 Dave: [(Tell you what it-)]
- 37 Malcolm: [It's g'nna. cost] a few bob that- putt'n [that=
- 38 Jamie: _____[Yeah.
- 39 Malcolm: =in..
- 40 (0.4)
- 41 Dave: **That bit between Bal:go an' bloody um-** (0.2)
- 42 Jamie: ((coughs))
- 43 (1.0)
- 44 Dave: ^Yih know- i- I- I mean w-w-well we kno:w how fast
- 45 **that road** deteriorates but-
- 46 Jamie: Yep

At the start of this Extract Malcolm mentions “Lake Mackay” which is a salt lake on the Western Australia – Northern Territory border about 500 km South-South-East of Halls Creek, where a new brine and sulphate of potash extraction plant has been under consideration. Yagga Yagga is an Aboriginal community to the North-West of the Lake and off the Balgo Road (which goes to Balgo community), which itself comes off the Tanami Track. Wyndham is the port on the coast north of Halls Creek to which the materials would be taken. These small, widely dispersed and hard to get to locations are shown on the map referred to earlier (Fig. 1).

In this Extract we see the consistent use of positive response tokens, primarily “yeah”, to show acknowledgement and indicate active alignment, rather than more neutral response tokens such as “mm”. In this way the responders claim epistemic access to the information under discussion (Gardner, 2001). In line 3, Jamie produces an acknowledging, falling intonation “yeah” at the Transition Relevance Place to align with Malcolm’s vague and metonymic informing alluding to the potential new mine development (“you %got Lake Macka:y comin' on- (.) on no:w,=”). Then in line 13, he produces the repeated “Yeh yeh yeh.”, aligning strongly epistemically with Malcolm’s description of the number of road trains which would be needed (Stivers, 2004). Line 17, “Yeah right” and line 22 “Yeah I know.” continue his strong epistemic

alignment with Malcolm's comment that "that fuckin' road" would need to be done up; the "right" acknowledging that two bits of information are linked (Gardner, 2007) and the "I know" transparently claiming shared epistemic status. Dave also acknowledges and aligns with this with his "Yeh—" accompanied by a single nod (line 27).

In lines 22 and 26, Jamie attempts to take the floor but cedes it to Malcolm, finally taking a turn in lines 31–32, to contribute a specific example to support Malcolm's argument about the need to upgrade the roads. He makes a recognitional proximal demonstrative reference to "this (0.3) fordy kay out tih Ru:by." accompanied by an accurate point – identifying the closest 40 kms of the Tanami Track from the turnoff to Ruby Plains Station as needing particular attention. In lines 41–45 Dave also makes reference to a particular stretch with the incomplete reference "That bit between Bal:go an' bloody um- (0.2)" which he later refers to as "that road".

All participants display shared assumed knowledge of the locations and the parts of roads being talked about, as well as the conditions of the roads, not to mention other shared knowledge about potential new mines; what happens in mining; routes to ports; and so on. The active alignment occurring in this section provides even stronger evidence for the shallow epistemic gradient and shared territories of information these participants assume. Dave's "we know how fast that road deteriorates" in lines 44–45 explicitly evokes their mutual knowledge, and Jamie's clipped "Yep" in line 46 indicates alignment with this.

To summarise so far, we have seen that in this conversation, the participants display equivalent epistemic status and equal rights to know the places referred to. Reference to locations is at a higher level of granularity than found in the urban settings which researchers have previously studied – they are talking about places which are further away and within a larger frame of reference. And the reference is consistently accompanied by large pointing gestures constructing virtual "maps" showing both distance and direction. There is frequent use of proper names for regions, settlements and major roads, and also of other kinds of recognitions such as definite descriptions. These Halls Creek interactants appear to be quite different from Schegloff's urban English speakers in their expert knowledge of the local region, as demonstrated through their propensity and ability to accompany their place formulations with accurate points.

5. Displayed asymmetries in epistemic status

Our first two examples are illustrative of how shallow epistemic gradients are displayed and oriented to by our interlocutors. We now turn to two examples where we see that even when detailed knowledge of locations is jointly shared among interlocutors, nonetheless epistemic asymmetries arise with respect to epistemic stance. What we show here, is how the management of epistemic stance around place reference appears somewhat different to what has been described for person reference (e.g. Raymond and Heritage, 2006), especially with respect to how such knowledge may be 'owned' by participants.

In Extract 3, Malcolm continues a previous discussion of the state of the roads, the need to bitumenize stretches of dirt road, and particular sections which have been bitumized, by announcing that a ten kilometre stretch of the Tanami Track has been bitumized. We break this example into sections for ease of discussion.

Extract 3A: A ten k o' bitumen

1 Malcolm: But then theh've: [a_l:so;=between [Yuendumu: an'=
 2 Dave: [Yeh- yeh- [Yeh-
 3 Malcolm: =the: e- Granite Mine;<theh's a ten k: o'
 4 bitumen.
 5 (0.4)
 6 Jamie: Yea:[h.
 7 Malcolm: [Theh done a ten k [section.
 8 Warren: [They must
 9 done about ha:lif that-(0.3) °distance°.
 10 Jamie: Well ^that's^ bin there fuh yea:rs.
 11 (0.2)
 12 Malcolm: Is it that ten k bi*t.
 Jamie: *..
 nods
 13 (0.3) *
 Jamie:
 twice (small)

Extract 3B: A ten k o' bitumen

25 Jamie: <#sho:ws y[u:h, (.)#(.) ho:w] goo:d t_hat=

 >>looking at M-->>looking at W-----

26 Dave: [heh hehh- huh]

27 Jamie: =st_a#:n's up to it.>
 ----#.....-----
 ---->>looking at M->

28 (.)

29 Malcolm: ^Fuck an' it's thirdy
 30 [y_ears;<I *thought it w's rea]son*ably=
 Jamie: *nods----->*

31 Dave: [\$^Y:eh^ >yeh- yeh-<\$]

32 Malcolm: =^ne:w *when [I*:
 33 Jamie: [Nope-h
 shakes>
 head

34 (.)

35 Malcolm: I thought it'd be about fi:ve years ^o*l:d or
 Jamie: *.....
 turns

36 some'ing.
 Jamie: -----
 hd rt to

37 Jamie: Thi[:rdy yea:*]rs ~that's been there,< (b't)=

38 Jamie: -----,,,,,*
 W and back to M

39 Dave: [N o : : .]

40 Jamie: =tha#t was ^r:ea:l ba#:d san:dy stre[tch.
 #,.....-----,
 #LH to hold cup->RFA P down sweeps R

41 Malcolm: [O::kay;
 42 [>that's why they did it<]

43 Jamie: [#Used t' get (.)] bo:gged in thuh san:d
 #.....-----,,,,,
 2nd RFA P down sweep R----->

44 [the#re all thuh time?
 ,,,#
 -->

45 Malcolm: [A:h.
 46 (.) # (0.2)
 #.....>
 Jamie: 3rd RFA
 47 Dave: Yih-
 Jamie: ...>
 P down
 48 Jamie: An' once they put that in there, (0.4)#(0.3) ~yih
#.....
 sweep R----->#LFA vert
 49 fly: along theh~

 H flick L----->
 50 (0.2) #
#
 51 Malcolm: A:h yeah;=y'd do- ten k'[s in ()
 52 Jamie: [an' ev# 'ry- (0.2) ten
 #.....
 LFA vertical
 53 yea:rs the#y might- # (0.3) knock th' bushes off
#.....
 and down LFA raise# LFA raise and sweep left
 54 aroun' it-#
#
 and down
 55 (0.8)
 56 Malcolm: ^hh:n^
 57 (.)
 58 Jamie: Does[n' get any w:ash or wea:r=
 59 Dave: [Yeh-
 60 Jamie: =[or any[thin' ay.
 61 Dave: [i-N:o [
 62 Malcolm: [^I kno:w.
 63 Warren: [Yeah ^right-
 64 (0.2)

65 Malcolm: Flat-

66 Jamie: Never been surface' tr- th't I kn- I'm aware

67 ^ofç

68 (0.3)

69 Jamie: resurfacedç

70 (1.2)

71 Jamie: >That j's ^show^ when you-< (.) put- good

72 material i:nç (.)

73 Warren: ~Yeah;~do it prop'ly [yeah

74 Jamie: [Do it prop'ly thuh first

75 time [rou:n',

76 Malcolm: [>B't some o' that- (0.6) country that's

77 (.) flat- country like that theh's a ^lodda that;

78 (0.4)

79 Malcolm: pa:st- [when you get pa:st (.) Ruby Plains.

80 Jamie: [Yea:h.

In this section Jamie makes a concessionary remark in the form of an assessment of the quality of work on the road – one might have thought this was recently done, it is so good (lines 25–27).

Malcolm then provides in his turns from line 29–36, an affective assessment of the news that the section was thirty years old with the stance marked “^Fuck an' it's thirty years,” in lines 29–30, followed by an account reiterating his original knowledgeable stance with respect to the bitumized road (“I thought ...”). He is acknowledging that he didn't have the knowledge (epistemic status) but also acknowledging that Jamie did in this instance know something about the road that he did not.

In line 37 Jamie uses a left-shifted temporal expression in closing off the dispute with “Thi:rdy yea:rs that's been there,”. He then goes on to do further remedial work to account for Malcolm's original stance and incorporate his knowledge, but also to further bed down his own territorial rights by providing more detail about what the road was like before.

So in line 40 Jamie says, “that was r:ea:l ba:d san:dy stretch.” and Malcolm responds with “O: :kay; >that's why they did it<”. Malcolm and Jamie then jointly produce an account for why the road has remained in good condition even though the bitumen was put down so long ago: it was done properly then; they have periodically cleared bushes from the side; that bit doesn't get any washes or wear.

This final segment of the Extract shows that Malcolm and Jamie are both being sensitive to the shallow epistemic gradient here in terms of the fact that they both should know a lot about these roads (epistemic status) but also that Jamie is sensitive to his epistemic primacy (greater ‘rights to know’ because of his old-timer status) but is working to downgrade this by explaining how Malcolm might have been tripped up on his knowledge of when the bitumen was laid.

Overall, then, the epistemic profile of this segment of the discussion is that it is primarily a negotiation between Malcolm and Jamie, with Dave making some contributions in the background to support Jamie's stance. Malcolm formulates an announcement as new knowledge relevant to the current topic. Jamie challenges this news, on the basis that the event being presented as recent and relevant actually occurred a long time ago. There is a bit of a question mark from Malcolm over the location and identification of the specific referent – the stretch of road. But Jamie – and Dave – treat the reference to place as successful and shared. Jamie upgrades his challenge by adding more and more detail, until Malcolm concedes. Once Malcolm has conceded, Jamie and Malcolm together formulate a concessionary account for Malcolm's mistake, grounded largely in Jamie's prior knowledge of the area.

Our final example, Extract 4 below, again illustrates the work the men do to acknowledge and respect each other's epistemic status, even in a context where a negotiation is needed – indeed in this example, is in focus - over the detail of what

is happening at a particular stretch of the Tanami. The group have been talking about doing up roads, and spending on roads, and there is then a small lapse in the conversation of approximately 4 s. Warren then commences a story about an unusual incident, relating how, while driving in a remote area outside Halls Creek recently, he has seen some lights in a place he didn't expect to see them in. The focus of the interaction is presentation of this as a puzzle to be solved, and the joint work the group do on solving it, which revolves around finding a plausible referent for the cause of the lights. Fig. 5 shows the particular stretch of the Tanami Track being discussed in this extract.

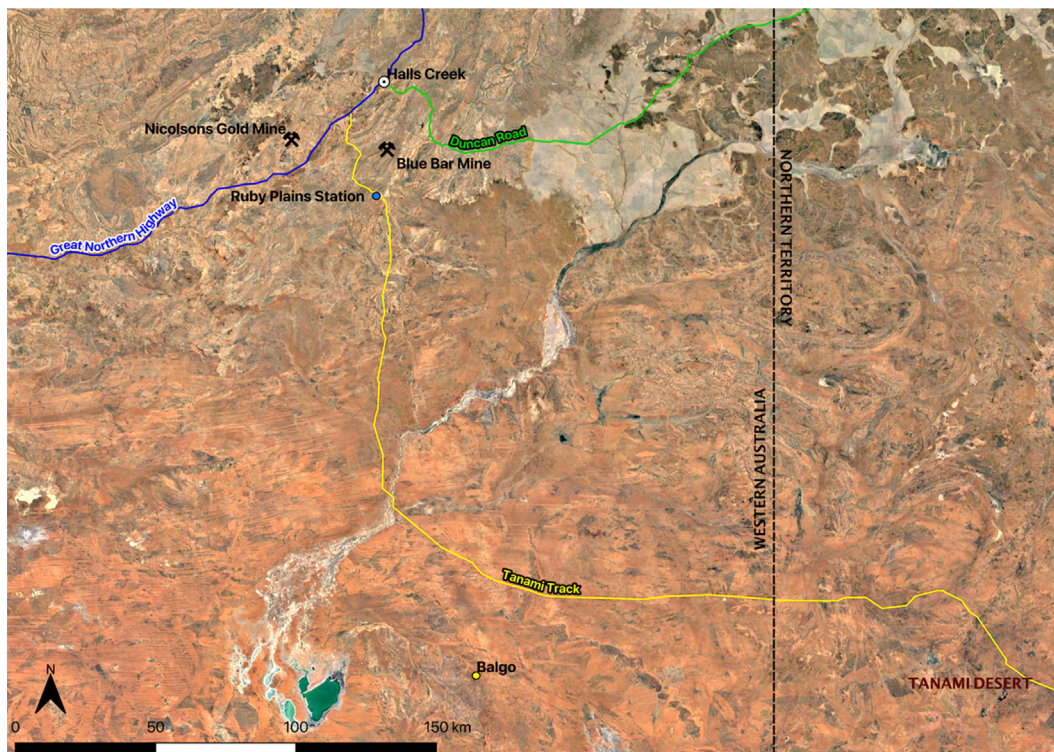


Fig. 5. Locations of the mines mentioned in Extract 4, with respect to the Tanami Track.

In Extract 4A, Warren introduces the puzzle.

Extract 4A: I came back the other night fr'm Balgo

```

1           # (0.5)
           #.....
           RFA IF pt over R shoulder to S (accurate)
2 Warren:  ^Out on thuh-^ (0.3) Tanami out here, <I came back
           .....
3           thee other night-, fr'm# Balgo; (0.7) an' it 's in
           //////////////// #
4           thuh dark; <an' I c'd #see about- (0.3) (0.3) >°I
           .....
           RFA Th pt over R shoulder S
    
```


Here Warren is not assuming shared knowledge of the particular spot where he saw the lights, but rather the ability in his audience to mentally locate this spot.

Extract 4B: I came back the other night fr'm Balgo

16 Warren: (0.3) &(0.4) @<an' it ^looked like the:h (0.2) (0.4)
@.....
 ,,,,& LFA/RFA up 90°, P face fwd-> 1.18

17 like a big ^pressure tank o' something up- (.)

18 **there;**<an' I thought it looks like a bloody:@u:h
@.....

19 (.)processing^ pla:nt.
 20 (0.6)

21 Warren: >I thought ^what thuh fuck that's doing^ **oud** `ere.<
 22 (1.0)

23 Warren: an' it's u:hm::nn:: (0.6) >°y'know I d-° I `aven't
 24 seen it durin' thuh day;< (.) >bu' it's j's' night
 25 t@ime;<I saw the ^lights on;<theh's lots o' lights
 @.....
 LFA/RFA up 90°, P face fwd

26 going,<an' I thought-@ (0.4)
@.....

27 Jamie: Tha's [not-
 28 Warren: [(so an'
 29 (0.2)

As shown in Extract 4B, Warren then proceeds to give an account for why he was so puzzled by seeing these lights in that place and to further propose hypotheses as to what they were, representing his thinking at the time with epistemically modified constructions such as “I thought” and “it looked like”: in lines 16–19 he makes the qualified statement “it ^looked like the:h (0.6) like a big ^pressure tank o' something up- (.) there;<an' I thought it looks like a bloody:@u:h (.)processing^ pla:nt.”, showing his proposed deduction concerning the problem to be based on his knowledge base about things like pressure tanks and processing plants and the connection he can make between these and the lights. He then elaborates on his puzzlement in line 21 with “>I thought^what thuh fuck that's doing^ **oud** `ere.<”. He explains that he hasn't seen the lights during the day previously and that it was only because it was night that they were visible. The reason Warren continued adding detail, and speculation on what the lights indicated, is likely because there is just one response token from Malcolm, and no suggestions or puzzle resolutions coming from the others. Their lack of responses mirrors their lack, so far, of knowledge that would resolve the puzzle.

Extract 4C: I came back the other night fr'm Balgo.⁸

27 Jamie: Tha's [not-
 28 Warren: [(so an')
 29 (0.2)
 30 Jamie: 'roun' ^Blue: Bar there somewhere?
 31 (1.0)
 32 Warren: Yea:h;< but's on the left hand si:de.
 33 (0.1)
 34 Dave: Well i' might [be Panto:ro.
 35 Jamie: [Q:h.
 36 (1.5) @ (0.5)
 Dave: @.....
 RA IF pt R horiz to SW (accurate)
 37 Dave: out thuh road here.
 ...-----
 38 (0.6)

 39 Dave: [It could-[could be-
 40 Jamie: &[No:,=i- o[n thuh-
 41 Warren: [No,<it's on thuh Tanami@though; &
 Dave: -----, //////////////// @
 Warren: &....., ////////////////, &
 RFA thumb pt over R shoulder to S (accurate)
 42 (0.4)

Warren's presentation of this experience as a mystery to be solved (including the listing of what he does and does not know about the lights, and an inventory of what objects he knows might have produced them) invites the collaboration of the others in finding a solution, and at the beginning of Extract 4C above Jamie and Dave start to postulate possible candidates for what mine or company might be at the specified location to explain Warren's sighting of these lights. Jamie begins in line 27 with "Tha's [not- (0.2) 'roun' Blue: Bar there somewhere". Blue Bar is a mine and Jamie's use of the minimal place name reference "Blue Bar" (i.e. without further specification of the identity of the place as a mine) is similar to the referential forms in Extracts 1 and 2 and indicates that he assumes that Warren (and presumably the others) possess an equivalent level of knowledge of the mine and the area. However his proposal also introduces a potential area of conflict, as if Warren had identified the lights as coming from Blue Bar mine, he would presumably have said so and there would be no puzzle to be solved. The negative polarity and rising intonation of the turn represents Jamie's contribution as acknowledging that the mystery of the lights is more in Warren's territory of knowledge than Jamie's. The negative polarity also projects a preferred agreement response from Warren that the lights are not at Blue Bar mine. Sure enough, Warren immediately shows that he recognises the intended referent and confirms Jamie's proposed formulation of the lights being somewhat near Blue Bar, with "Yeah", but rejects the suggestion that it is right near Blue Bar on the grounds that "but's on the left hand si:de": the lights were off on the left hand side of the road, whereas Blue Bar mine is on the right hand side of the road "coming in" to Halls Creek.

Dave then produces an alternative suggestion in line 34, with "Well i' might be Panto:ro.", using the most minimal name for another mining company. He produces an index finger point to the South-West accompanying an elaborated locational reference using the proximal deictic "here": "out the road here". The minimal recognitional place reference formulation shows that Dave brings this up not as new knowledge but as shared knowledge. His "might" is not about his knowledge of Pantoro but rather about whether they would be shining lights. Both Jamie and Warren respond negatively to this suggestion, with Warren providing an account for his rejection of it in line 41 with "No, <it's on thuh Tanami though;", accompanying this with an accurate thumb point over his shoulder to the south. Warren's response also displays equivalent epistemic status (just reminding Dave that the lights he saw are on the Tanami, not where he expects Pantoro to be).

⁸ Pantoro's Nicolson Gold Mine is SW of Halls Creek.

Extract 4D: I came back the other night fr'm Balgo

43 Dave: >Yeah@yeah<;=b't the've god a lea:se out the@:re;@
 @.....@
 RA IF pt 40° to SSW (fairly accurate)

44 (0.3)

45 Warren: Ah maybe th' doin' s'me drilling:.

46 (0.4)

47 Warren: [Maybe i' w's a d[rill rig o' so[omething the:re;

48 Dave: [Ah- [maybe; [yeah;

49 Dave: Yeah.

50 (0.4)

51 Dave: [~Yeah.

52 Warren: [>Maybe tha's whad it was,

53 (0.3)

54 Jamie: Oh ri[ghto;

55 Warren: [&Cos so[mething's stay- sticking up pretty
 &.....-----
 RA/LA vert extend 90° P fwd

56 ta:&ll 'n th'n (0.4) the light's sorda >shining,&=
 ---&...---A vert, spread cupped hands P down-> &
 57 &an' it< looked like a big pressure tank or
 &.....-----
 RA/LA over Hd 60°, Fs spread, P in->1.58

58 something;<y'know like a bi- (0.4) you use fer a
 -----,////////

59 processing&plant;[<°an' I thought ^u:h (0.2) [·hhh=

60 Jamie: [Yeah-. [Yeh-

Warren: ,,,,,,&

61 Warren: =hadn't heard ev anything out there;

62 Warren: [°U:hm:°, so mayb' I' was just a drill rig °thad=

63 Jamie: [Yeh ^righ'

64 Warren: =I-h I saw (0.2) wo:rking durin' thuh ^night-

It is through Warren's response to Dave's suggestion in line 41 in Extract 4C that his lack of knowledge of the new Pantoro project becomes clear to Dave and at this point, Dave asserts his epistemic authority – he has some new information; Pantoro have a new lease. In line 43 of Extract 4D, he acknowledges Warren's implied assumption that Pantoro's mine is in a different place with repeated “yeah yeah”. He then provides the new information: “b't the've god a lea:se out the@:re;” (with a fairly accurate index finger point to the SSW of where they are sitting). Clarification of the reference to which Pantoro mine is performed multimodally – use of the minimal name “Pantoro” has not been enough, but distinct points to the SSW and SE differentiate the locations. Both Warren and Jamie immediately accept this as a possible explanation with elaboration that the best hypothesis is that this is “a drill rig”: in line 45 Warren produces a new information acknowledgement with “ah” and then says, “maybe th' doin' s'me drilling: (0.4) Maybe i' w's a drill rig o' something the:re; (0.4) >Maybe tha's whad it was,”, which Dave aligns with epistemically with “maybe; yeah; Yeah. (0.4) Yeah.” in lines 48–51. Jamie also produces a news marking alignment in line 54 with “Oh righto;”. Warren's immediate acceptance of this new knowledge is evidence that he is not disputing Dave's epistemic primacy here – it is possible for Dave to have knowledge that Warren does not.

In lines 55–64, Warren returns to an elaborated description of what he saw (“it < looked like ... I thought”) and why he was puzzled (“I thought u:h (0.2) ·hhh= =hadn't heard ev anything out there_i”) and reframes the experience as plausibly arising from something at the new Pantoro lease that Dave has told them about (“so mayb' I' was just a drill rig °thad I-h I saw (0.2) wo:rkng durin' thuh night-”). Throughout this stretch, Jamie produces positive aligning response tokens with “Yeah-.” and “Yeh righ’”.

Dave then provides more information about the new Pantoro lease from lines 65–76 in Extract 4E.

Extract 4E: I came back the other night fr'm Balgo⁹

65 Dave: @Apart fr'm this stuff out here that go@t- u:hm-
 @.....-----@.....
 RA H pt P down 20° SW. H moves L

66 (0.5) u:hm (0.2) (2.5) they've got an a:rea out
-----
 30° to pt S->

67 there th't's quite a la:rgə a:rea_i (0.3)@out in
 -----@-----
 H circle

68 that Blue Bar:-@ a:rea?
 -----@.....
 P down. RA H pt 40° to R, SSE (accurate)

69 (0.3)@
 ----@

70 Jamie: @Yeh-
 @....>
 RFA horiz P out to L face level

71 (.)
 ...

72 Dave: an- b'd it's on both sides o' thuh roa:d?
 to R to L to R

73 @ (0.5)
 @.....
 RFA horiz P out to front

74 Warren: °O[kay_i

75 Dave: [an' then: (0.6)@ (0.4) thee other area they
-----@.....
 RFA 45° to L over shoulder,
 got's at@ (Gran:t's)^Pa:tch, yih know:; y- up- up
,@
 H pt NE

76 thuh (good-) up tih (Can:tanet).
 (0.3)

78 Warren: Uh hu_h,
 (1.7)

[then new topic from Dave]

⁹ Pantoro have another mine at Grant's Creek. We can't locate a 'Cantanet'.

In a non-marked uptake and elaboration of his previous proposal, which Warren first rejected because the referent he thought Dave was referring to was on the wrong side of the road, Dave then launches into a longer explanation underpinning this solution to the mystery – mentioning that this is a different area to the more established Pantoro mine (“*Apart fr’m this stuff out here*” (pointing to the SW) “*they’ve got an a:rea out there th’t’s quite a la:rge a:rea_i (0.3)*” (pointing to the S), which crucially is in the Blue Bar mine region (see Fig. 3). Furthermore, it is on both sides of the road (line 72). Just as in Extract 3 Jamie worked to provide a rationale for why Malcolm did not know that the road had been bitumized 30 years ago, in this part of Extract 4 Dave is providing more information to support Warren’s claim to have seen the lights on the left hand side of the road (i.e. not at Blue Bar). Warren accepts this with a softly spoken “*oKay_i*” in line 74 and in line 78 “*Uh huh,*”, and the topic is then closed with no further comment on Dave’s suggestion by any of the participants.

It is relevant to note that this whole topic development in itself is indicative of the shared territory of knowledge of the four men. It is only with a group mutually acknowledged to have deep shared knowledge of the area that Warren would be able to raise such a puzzle for consideration. Again, there is general orientation to the ‘shallow epistemic gradient’ between the men – each presents information as shared knowledge and must then do some additional work to get back to equilibrium. In this example there does not seem to be a contest of who has ‘rights to know’. No one is disputing Warren’s epistemic primacy about knowing where the lights were that he has direct experience of. No one is disputing Dave’s knowledge that Pantoro has a new mining lease in that particular location. It shows that they don’t share everything.

6. Conclusion

In this article we have shown how shared epistemic domains over places result in similar patterns of minimisation of reference as has been described for person reference, and that if there are epistemic asymmetries that emerge in conversations between members of a ‘society of intimates’, then turn design reflects the negotiation and management of epistemic status and precedence.

We have taken as our primary case study a 2-h interaction by four men who have driven the vast distances of their local region for many years, through an area of north west Australia about three times the size of England. Their talk focuses largely on remote area driving and the state of the roads. In general, the participants display equal rights to know the places referred to, and work sensitively to maintain a shared acknowledgment of the shallow epistemic gradient between them. They display a detailed and specific knowledge of their environment, with frequent use of minimal recognitional forms of reference to place, including use of proper names for both regions and major roads (“the Kimberley”, “the Tanami”, “the fuckin Duncan”). Reference to locations is consistently accompanied by large pointing gestures constructing virtual ‘maps’ showing both distance and direction.

The research reported here suggests that living together over long periods of time in a small, close-knit community affects both the forms of spatial reference used and the assumption that these will be resolvable by co-participants in the interaction, given the territories of information they share grounded in shared experience. However, while there is a high degree of assumed knowledge, participants also display an orientation to subtle differences in rights to know in disputes over details of locations which are resolved when it is established that one member can provide more specific details or a knowledge of the history of construction of particular roads. There are instances where very detailed and subtle negotiations occur involving emerging asymmetries in knowledge between the participants. Rights to know – and ability to win out in disputes over specifics – are grounded in experiential knowledge.

Further, the detail and specificity of the negotiations over place illustrate the detail and specificity of the participants’ knowledge of their region. Their demonstrated knowledge of place is different in kind to what has been claimed with respect to at least some English speakers in urban settings. This article addresses the gap in the literature on how remote area speakers of English talk about place, thereby setting us up to consider the claim that Anglo and Aboriginal speakers design references to place differently, based on differential attention to and knowledge of place.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Glossary

IF	index finger
H	hand
RH	right hand

LH	left hand
WH	whole hand
P	palm
F	finger
Th	thumb
Hd	head
A(s)	arm(s)
RA	right arm
LA	left arm
LFA	left forearm
RFA	right forearm
Pt	point
Fwd	forward
Bwd	backward
D	down
Vert	vertical
L	left
R	right
N	north
E	east
W	west
S	south
#.....	preparation phase of the gesture
#----	stroke phase of the gesture
#,,,,,	retraction phase of the gesture

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