

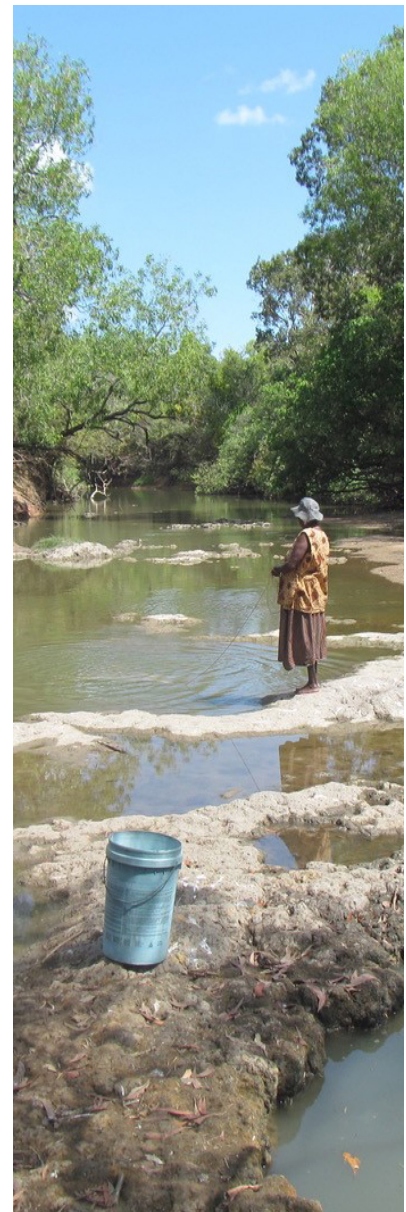
OzSpace: The Sociotopography of Indigenous Australian languages

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Australian languages are widely cited as depending overwhelmingly on abstract cardinal terms such as *east* and *south* for spatial reference, rather than egocentric projections such as *in front of* or *to the left of*, or geomorphic projections such as *upriver* or *seaward* (Dasen & Mishra 2010:301-302; Levinson 2003:75,336; Majid et al. 2004), supporting neo-Whorfian claims that arbitrary linguistic categories shape conceptual representations of space (Le Guen 2011; Levinson 2003; Majid et al 2004). However, considerable under-recognized diversity exists in Australian spatial reference. Egocentric projections are more widespread than previously realised (Palmer et al 2019, 2021), and spatial systems invoking aspects of local topography are diverse and widespread, even pervasive (Hoffmann 2016; Hoffmann et al forthcoming; Palmer et al 2019, 2021). In many languages, multiple systems coexist, raising questions of what governs use of each. These findings support the Topographic Correspondence Hypothesis (TCH), which proposes that aspects of a language's spatial reference system often correlate with salient topographic features of the language locus (Palmer 2015; see Bohnermeyer et al 2014; Dasen & Mishra 2010:307-309), suggesting spatial representations are constructed at least in part in response to the environment.

Now a handful of cross-linguistic studies have found that diverse spatial referential strategy preferences operate among individuals within language communities (Bohnermeyer et al 2014; Cerqueglini 2018; Dasen & Mishra 2010; Shapero 2016), correlating with environment, group-level cultural practices (e.g. dominant subsistence mode), and individual demographic factors (occupation, age, gender, education etc) (Lum 2017; Palmer et al 2018a, 2018b; Schlossberg 2018). The Sociotopographic Model proposes that the role of the environment in shaping spatial language is mediated by the nature of each individual's interaction with their environment, and other sociocultural factors (Palmer et al 2017). For Australian languages, intra-language diversity is only described for age, in three languages (de Leon 1995; Edmonds-Wathen 2012; Meakins & Algy 2016; Meakins et al 2016). The extent that TCH and sociotopography apply among Australian languages remains unknown.

The first step towards an empirically grounded understanding of the wider implications of Australian spatial reference systems is to establish what components of spatial systems actually occur in what combinations across the continent. This talk introduces the *OzSpace* project, which aims to characterize spatial systems across Australia, test hypotheses about the role of the environment and of sociocultural factors in shaping such systems, and reveal under-recognized aspects of Australian spatial systems. The project has two broad threads: 1) A survey of spatial systems in 220+ languages, correlated with the topography of each language locus. 2) A rich field-based sociotopographic study of spatial language and spatial cognition in half a dozen languages whose communities retain demographic diversity. The talk also presents a new typology of projective spatial relations employed in the *OzSpace* project, including a rarely recognised category of egocentric extrinsic reference (the SAP-landmark strategy), and a new classification of types relative frame of reference.



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