

The development of verbal prefixation in the Iwaidjan languages: The future tense

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The topic of this talk is the development of the future tense prefixes in the Iwaidjan languages. The paper argues that Proto-Iwaidjan possessed preverbal clitics that formed a preverbal clitic complex. These clitics expressed pronominal information about the subject and object as well as TAM information. As in other Non-Pama-Nyungan languages (Harvey & Mailhammer Ms.), these clitics developed into prefixes in the Iwaidjan daughter languages. This paper argues that the forms of the future prefixes found in modern Amurdak, Iwaidja and Mawng do not go back to one paradigm. Instead, they seem to reflect at least two distinct sources that are best explained as parts of the preverbal clitic complex that Proto-Iwaidjan appears to have inherited from Proto-Australian.

The data for this reconstruction come from published descriptions of the three languages in question (Capell & Hinch 1970; Pym & Larrimore 1979; Singer 2006; Mailhammer 2009; Mailhammer 2014; Mailhammer 2017; Mailhammer & Harvey 2018) as well as field work. The future paradigms for intransitive verbs are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Intransitive future prefixes in Amurdak (Class 3), Iwaidja and Mawng

Person/number	Amurdak	Iwaidja	Mawng
1sg	<i>an-</i>	<i>ŋ-ana-</i>	<i>ŋana-</i>
1nsg/pl.incl	<i>aban-</i>	<i>adbana-</i>	<i>argbana-/adbana-</i>
1nsg/pl.excl	<i>aran-</i>	<i>ŋadbana-</i>	<i>ŋadbana-</i>
2sg	<i>wan-</i>	<i>aŋmana-</i>	<i>aŋbana-</i>
2nsg/pl	<i>uran-</i>	<i>gudbana-</i>	<i>gudbana-</i>
3sg	<i>wan-</i>	∅	<i>iwa(na)-(M)/iŋbana-(F), aŋbana-(LL)/mana-(VE)/aba(na)-(ED)/</i>
3nsg/pl	<i>iran-/waran-</i>	<i>ana-</i>	<i>awa(na)-</i>

The Iwaidja and Mawng forms appear to be reconstructable as coming from one ancestral paradigm if one assumes that Iwaidja has lost gender marking on intransitive verbs. However, the 2sg in Iwaidja is irreconcilable with such an interpretation, as the occurrence of /m/ is unexplained. And once the lens is widened and the transitive prefixes in Iwaidja are considered, it becomes clear that the underlying morpheme that expresses the future tense is in fact *ma(na)-* rather than *ba(na)-* which can be abstracted for Mawng allowing for standard morphophonemic variants (Pym & Larrimore 1979: 116–120; Singer 2006: 57). Now, Amurdak, while seemingly displaying the same morpheme as Mawng, also has forms with *m-* in transitive verbs, e.g. *a-man-* 1sg.fut in *aman-ma-lu* ‘I’ll get it.’ The *b*-initial forms can be compared with a Proto-Australian modal clitic that has future tense readings in many daughter languages (Harvey & Mailhammer Ms.). I propose that Proto-Iwaidjan inherited this clitic but that it also had an *m*-initial clitic that could express the future tense, possibly originating as an adverb, as periphrastic constructions are common in Iwaidjan languages and a potential source for inflectional morphology (Caudal & Mailhammer 2021). Iwaidja would have developed the *m*-initial forms and Mawng the *b*-initial forms. However, Amurdak seems to have mixed the *b*- and *m*-initial forms, while Iwaidja may have used lenited forms of the *b*-forms in the imperative, e.g. *aŋ-ana-*.

This reconstruction sheds new light on how the prefixes in the Iwaidjan languages can be reconstructed, which may be a pathway to explaining other unexplained forms in those languages, especially in Amurdak (see Mailhammer 2017 for further details), and possibly for other Australian languages.

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