

Two general points arise from these examples. First, the role of a linguistic anthropologist (Garde) in the team was crucial in breaking into this problem—for the dual reasons that (a) by his disciplinary training he took an approach that did not bracket out the contribution of interaction to verbal formulation, and (b) prolonged participant observation while learning to speak a related language fluently enabled him to understand a system that can easily slip by unnoticed if one takes a denotationally focussed inquiry as starting point. Later this was followed up by Birch, who, as the investigator who spent most time in the field and has gained the most fluency in the language, was best placed to apply participant-observational methods in Iwaidja itself.

Second, there are interesting reasons why verbal terms seem to play an important role in the system of triangular kin terms. Partly this seems to follow from the fact that verbs can index referent sets (subject and object), which combined with the subset-reference principle mentioned above allows relationships to be constructed as reflecting a common standpoint on the referent. But they also seem to reflect a method of describing kin relationships that uses abstract metaphorical extensions of verbal terms ('find', 'spear') to construct the rather ineffable shared relationships that can then be expressed as holding with respect to the referent, jointly, between both speaker and addressee.

p. 203 8.4.2 Lexicalized gender agreement

As mentioned in §8.3.2, when we began the DoBeS project it appeared that Iwaidja had jettisoned most of the morphology associated with a five-way gender contrast in proto-Iwaidjan, and still preserved in Mawng. However, a number of obscure verbs—again mostly thrown up by interdisciplinary fieldwork—have shown that far more of the proto-Iwaidjan gender agreement prefixes on verbs have survived than we originally thought. These relics are difficult to detect, however, because of the highly lexicalized and non-productive nature of some parts of the Iwaidja prefix paradigms.

Often these are limited to a single verb—what Singer (2007) has called 'lexicalized verb agreement', rather like a verb + noun idiom (*kick the bucket*) except that the fixed element is a pronominal prefix of fixed gender, rather than a noun (see §8.3.2). To get an impression of what has happened with Iwaidja, imagine that English had just kept *he* and *she* as 3rd person subject pronouns (shedding *it* and *they*) and just kept *'m* as object pronoun—except that a few verbs can only use *it* as subject, regardless of the referent, and a few others can only use *'m* as object, again regardless of the referent.

If there is just a single verb with a particular prefixal combination, of course, segmentation is difficult to justify since there are no recurring partials, which then makes it hard to demonstrate whether the word should be treated as a verb rather than a deverbal nominal. Luckily, however, the issue can usually be clinched by seeing if there is a future form, since the future prefix *-(a)na-* is generally placed between prefix and root.

To illustrate, here are three examples of previously unattested gender prefixes with lexicalized verbs.

8.4.2.1 *ang-* as intransitive subject

In Mawng, this gender form denotes what Singer (2007) called the 'land and liquids' gender. Pym and Larrimore (1979) refer to this prefix occurring in the object slot of a score or so of transitive verbs generally associated with 'earth' or 'ground', but do not mention the possibility that it can also represent intransitive subjects.