

Methods for recording kin terms through the so-called ‘genealogical method’ pioneered by W. H. R. Rivers (1910), and employed during the famously interdisciplinary Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait, project this English downplaying of contextual factors into the elicitation of kinship terms, by not treating speaker-addressee kinship relations as one of the factors that needs to be investigated within the domain of kinship terminology.

p. 201 Since the early 1980s Australianists have uncovered a number of languages whose systems of kinship terminology do index speaker-addressee, i.e. interactional, \hookrightarrow relations through systems of so-called ‘triangular’ or ‘trirelational’ terms—see e.g. Laughren (1982), McConvell (1982), Merlan (1989), Garde (2002), and Evans (2003). Lea (2004) has reported a very similar system in the Amazonian language Mëbêngôkre. One object of our research was therefore to see whether Iwaidja had such a system, and if so to document the relevant lexical terms. Note also, before continuing, that in some circumstances it is possible to represent the ‘triangle’ of kin reference in context through a two-place verb: this is straightforward if one relation is siblinghood (e.g. ‘our mother’, where speaker and addressee are both children of the same mother) but can also be achieved, more obliquely, by appealing to other shared properties (e.g. both being in the same lineage) that can be reflected in conventionalized terms, as we shall see with the term *arrambadbi* below.

Even knowing what to look for, though, does not necessarily make it easier to find: asking speakers of Aboriginal languages if they have terms that mean things like ‘the one who is my daughter and your mother’ never, in my experience, turn up the sort of lexical items one is looking for. Initially (in our 2004 field season), we therefore adopted a strategy that built on linguistic anthropologist Murray Garde’s own expertise in the very elaborated trirelational system of Bininj Gun-wok, known in that language as Kun-derbi, Gun-dembui, and other dialect-specific variants. Since most Iwaidja speakers also speak excellent Bininj Gun-wok, it was possible for him to work by giving examples of Kun-derbi terms and asking speakers how they would express them in Iwaidja—and in fact it turns out that Iwaidja does have a number of such terms, in a register known in Iwaidja as *kundeybi*.

The name of this register is a clear Bininj Gun-wok loan, though the actual terms within it are all indigenous to Iwaidja. Once we had a few examples, speakers then got the hang of our line of enquiry and began to furnish other items. (Note, methodologically, that in effect this took the expertise that Garde had developed in another mutually known language of the region through participant observation, then proceeded to use it as an initial source for translation-based elicitation, but where the elicitation language is much closer in structure to the target language than English is. Later on, as Birch developed fluency in Iwaidja, new *Kundeybi* terms have turned up through direct participant observation in Iwaidja.)

Of the seven *Kundeybi* terms that were collected by late 2008, two are verbal in form.

p. 202 The form *arrambadbi* is used precisely in the Mary-and-Joan scenario outlined above: it would be used by a woman speaking to her daughter about someone who is the speaker’s sister and the addressee’s (maternal) aunt. Analytically, it combines a vowel-harmonized²¹ form of the prefix *arrumb(u)-* ‘he/she/they \rangle us’ with the \hookrightarrow verb root *adb* ‘find’, thus in this context ‘(the one such that [someone (to wit, my mother)]) found (conceived) us (i.e. myself and her [and on to you in the next generation])’.²² Other prefixal combinations with this verb are also possible.

The second verbal form, *yarrunan*, is used by a woman to someone she calls *ngawiny* ‘patrichild; child through the male line, i.e. brother’s child for a woman’s speaker’, in referring to someone else she calls *ngawiny*, who would therefore be a sibling of the addressee. Formally, this combines the prefix *yarrun-* ‘you singular \rangle us; you plural \rangle me, us’ with the verb root *an* ‘spear’; at present the motivation for this locution is not understood.