The centrality of language in human life means we cannot document any language without understanding all the spheres of knowledge it is used to talk about. Equally, undocumented languages contain too much information to be wasted on linguists alone. As the medium through which the whole fabric of traditional knowledge about everything in the world is transmitted, the importance of these languages stretches out in the direction of many fields of enquiry, from ethnoecology to comparative jurisprudence to deep history to

the study of musical and ↳ verbal art. Linguists, then, have a responsibility not just to their own field but to all areas of scholarship concerned with the almost infinite varieties of human creativity, and we abrogate this responsibility if we do not seek to follow our documentation of the languages we study down all these lanes and byways of orally transmitted lore.

But, as we struggle to learn a field language and talk to the people who speak it about what matters in their lives, we quickly become aware of how narrow are the boundaries of our knowledge. Whether we fail to identify a local plant or animal species, can't figure out how to describe special ways of tying up roof thatch, or ask dumb questions about mystifying ethnographic details, we risk foreshortening our investigations because—in the words of Ralph Bulmer's Kalam teacher who explained why they hadn't bothered to give him the sort of nuanced terminology for rocks which they had for plants—'why should we waste our time telling you something you couldn't possibly understand?'[2]

One of the appeals of fieldwork is that we get the opportunity to develop interests in many new subjects, from botany through ethnography to thatch-making.[3] But few linguists reach the point where we are able to really penetrate to the heart of all these fields, and in practice the best way to extend our documentary coverage is through some form of interdisciplinary fieldwork. The linguist can then work in concert with experts who can pose the right questions to engage the deep knowledge that speakers have of particular areas. The same Kalam people who had fobbed Bulmer off with a single word, purportedly for all kinds of rock, readily gave his geologist colleague John Chappell a long and nuanced list, because 'your friend's questions showed that he does know about rocks'.

Some form of interdisciplinary collaboration in fieldwork, then, is essential to coaxing out a full encyclopedic coverage of the fine-grained categorizations of its culture and environment which any language contains. In this chapter I show how this can happen in practice, drawing on the efforts myself and a number of colleagues to document an Australian Aboriginal language, Iwaidja.

To put scientific flesh on the procedural bones of my argument, I will use a specific semantic problem to integrate the case studies I will use in this chapter: the problem of recording a detailed verb vocabulary. In the rest of this section I briefly sketch a range of approaches to interdisciplinary fieldwork, and then give relevant background on the Iwaidja language documentation project. In §8.2 I consider the general problem

posed by event-denoting expressions—typically realized as ↳ verbs—for semantic typology. In §8.3 I set up three particular grammatico-semantic problems posed by the verb lexicon in Iwaidja: the unusually high proportion of verbs in the lexicon, the analytic difficulties posed by a degenerate and partially fossilized system of double argument agreement across (originally) five genders, and the large number of long and (at least initially) apparently unanalysable verb stems. In §8.4 I illustrate how interdisciplinary fieldwork taking in a range of other disciplines or contingencies driving particular types of data connection—material culture, musicology, linguistic anthropology, art, medical expressions, tidal terms—ended up serendipitously providing data that allowed us to make progress with the problems set up in §8.3. Finally, I draw together these threads into a conclusion in §8.5.

## 8.1.1 Strategies for interdisciplinary fieldwork

Interdisciplinary fieldwork involving linguists can take many forms, including: