

The difficulty of decomposing verb stems in Iwaidja contrasts starkly with the situation in Bininj Gun-wok just to its south. Consider how you say ‘he has a headache’ in the two languages. In Iwaidja (2), the verb stem *ɲaɲpanpu* (*ngartbanbu*) simply means ‘have headache’ or, more carefully, ‘OBJ has a headache’, lit. ‘it headaches him’, since the verb takes an experiencer object (Evans 2004). It is likely that this verb contains a segment *pu* ‘strike’ etymologically, but there are no evident recurrences of a morpheme *ɲaɲpan* in the corpus, and the root for ‘head’ is the unrelated *-waɲaɲa*.

(3)

<i>ɲiɲaɲpanpun</i>	
lw	<i>ri-ngartbanbu-n</i>
3sg.m.A 3sg.f.O -head.aches-NPst	
‘She/He has a headache.’ ¹⁷	

In Bininj Gun-wok, by contrast, most verb lexemes readily yield to segmentation into crisply defined morphemes (3). There are practically no morphophonemic changes, and almost every element is attested elsewhere as the sole lexical morpheme in a word, so that its meaning can be easily isolated and its contribution to the verbal lexeme identified.

(4)	<i>ka-kodj-ngarrkme-ø</i>	[cf. <i>kun-kodj //</i>	<i>√ngarrkme //</i>	<i>ka-ngarrkme-ø</i>]
BGW	3sgSubj-head-suffer-NPst	IV-head	suffer	3sgSubj-suffer-NPst
	‘He has a headache.’	‘head’	‘suffer’	‘He suffered’

Morpheme identification basically depends on the presence of multiple combinations. Would a larger corpus reveal recurrent elements that would allow us to segment such verbs? We return to this question in the next section.

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8.4 Some Examples of Interdisciplinary Fieldwork in the Iwaidja Project and of How They Built Up the Verb Lexicon

Having posed the three analytic problems in the preceding section—all unsolved at the time we began the Volkswagen project—I will now go through each of them, bringing in data largely gathered as a result of various interdisciplinary inquiries, and show how the rich haul of verb lexemes that these threw up as a by-product have helped us to furnish answers.

8.4.1 Semantics of verbal expressions

Some explanation is required if the proportion of the lexicon made up of nouns and verbs varies radically from one language to another (cf. §8.3.1, ‘Lexicalization in a verby language’). As it turns out, the verbiness of the Iwaidja lexicon seems to reflect a number of logically distinct factors, corresponding to the questions posed in §8.3.1, which I now examine one at a time.