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Though documentation of the animal names was almost complete by the mid-1980s, the existence and extent of the hopping verb set did not begin to get ↪ comprehensive documentation until the late 1990s, thanks to Murray Garde's very thorough participant-observation-based fieldwork. This included substantial involvement in hunting trips where remarks about gait turned out to be a crucial step in identifying macropod types. In this case the initial identification of the noun terms had been carried out by teams working in close collaboration with biologists, while the verb terms came later through more purely linguistic work. This example illustrates, incidentally, the importance of participant observation in throwing up material that may be overlooked in elicitation or lines of questioning that draw on disciplinary expert's beliefs about preexisting categories. But my main point at this stage is to illustrate that there was a significant time-lag between recording the nominal and the verbal terms in the same vocabulary domain.

Before continuing, it is worth spelling out three key assumptions about language documentation, and in fact about linguistic fieldwork more generally:

- (a) It aims for as complete, accurate, and emic⁹ lexical coverage as possible.
- (b) Not all domains are equally easy to elicit.
- (c) Ease of elicitation will reflect, among other things:
 - The 'exhibitability' of stimuli, e.g. by ostensive elicitation (pointing at body parts, or colouring them in to show their extent on a drawing of a body¹⁰) or by showing pictures of birds, or playing recordings of bird or frog calls.
 - The degree of isomorphism to contact language(s), in the case of translational elicitation. No great semantic harm is done if an English speaker gets the German or Russian words *Bruder* or *brat* by asking for the translation of 'brother', but if I do this for Kayardild¹¹ I will likely end up with one or more inexact translations: *thabuju* (older brother; male speaker), *duujinda* (younger brother; male speaker), or *kularrinda* (brother of female speaker, but also sister of male speaker).
 - Word class can affect the ease of semantic determination. The simpler a word's morphological possibilities, the easier it will be to obtain, and it is also easier to identify the semantic contribution of the lexical stem and disentangle it from the contributions of a range of inflectional material. Since verbs tend to be the morphologically most complex part of a language's lexicon, this adds an additional layer of difficulty to their relative non-exhibitability.

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- ↪ High-frequency lexical items are easier to detect and define. Excerption from text material is one of the best checks on what a word means, so the more frequently it occurs the more reliable the data is.

Verbs can be difficult to elicit and understand for all but the last of the above reasons. They are hard to exhibit (try imitating the hopping of a female rock wallaby!), generally show limited isomorphism across languages, and belong to a word class that tends to have more complicated morphology than others. But interdisciplinary investigations have the potential to ramp up the likelihood of occurrence of particular verbs in particular domains, thus getting the frequency factor on side, or at least condensing enough discussion on particular topics to give them a chance of showing up in the corpus.

8.3 Verbs in the Iwaidja Lexicon: Three Issues

the set of nouns in a language is always much larger than the set of verbs (Foley 1986: 113)