I have been working on this language, on and off, since the early 1990s. Throughout that period I have interacted with various types of other investigator. Early on in my engagement with the language, my non-linguist colleagues were lawyers and anthropologists during the preparation of the Croker Island Native Title claim in the mid-1990s.[7] This involved the checking of vocabulary in a number of domains, particularly kinship, social structure, land and sea ownership, and terms for hunting and traditional food-divisions. Later, from 2003 to 2007, I led a language documentation project, funded by the Volkswagenstiftung's DoBeS program[8] and set up on an explicitly interdisciplinary basis. In addition to the two linguists—namely myself and Bruce Birch, who was our anchor-man in the field—this project involved three primary guest fieldworkers: musicologist Linda Barwick, material culture specialist Kim Akerman, and linguistic anthropologist Murray Garde. Each of these guest fieldworkers made two or more short fieldtrips to Croker Island and its surrounds, accompanied by Birch and/or myself. During these trips we carried out detailed investigations of their areas of interest, resulting in products such as recordings of song series (see Barwick et al. 2005; Barwick, Birch, and Evans 2007) and inventories of material culture (see Akerman 2007). The project was also able to enlist the skills of art historian and photographer Sabine Hoeng, who has now begun a PhD on the history of art in the region but also worked with Birch on the compilation of several posters for community use showing traditional knowledge of shellfish, fish, and plants (Birch et al. 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2007) and in the preparation of a medical phrase book to assist visiting medical personnel (Marrala et al. 2008). We also brought in a range of biologists from the Northern Territory museum who were able to assist with plant, shellfish, fish, and turtle identifications.

8.2 The Elusive Verb Lexicon

Marianne Mithun (2007b: 32) has pointed out: 'The process of elicitation does tend to reap many more nouns than verbs.' There are many reasons for the difficulty of eliciting verb vocabulary. They include the
p. 189 greater complexity ↳ involved in showing visual prompts for events rather than entities, and the fact that many investigators (e.g. taxonomic biologists) don't tend to think of asking for them. But perhaps most important is the fact that they are likely to be the most cross-linguistically variable part of a language's vocabulary in terms of denotation. This makes it difficult to know in advance what to ask for on the basis of previously studied languages. To make matters worse, the fact that so many grammatical problems are intimately tied up with the grammatical and semantic structure of verbs means that falling short on your event lexicon can hold you back from understanding central architectural issues in the grammar you are dealing with.

As an initial example, consider the rich set of terms in Bininj Gun-wok and other Central Arnhem languages for macropods—kangaroos and wallabies. Some dialects of Bininj Gun-wok—Gun-djeihmi and Kunwinjku—are spoken not far to the south of Iwaidja in Kakadu National Park, and partly due to this, work by biologists and anthropologists interested in Western Arnhem Land flora and fauna had assembled fairly comprehensive species lists by the mid 1980s (Altman 1981; Chaloupka and Giuliani 1984; Russell-Smith 1985). These included terms for all macropod species living in the area, including distinct terms for adult males, adult females, and young. For the antilopine wallaroo (Macropus antilopinus), for example, there are the terms *karndakidj* (adult male), *karndayh* (adult female), and *djamunbuk* (juvenile), as well as *kalaba* for an exceptionally large adult male. And for the agile wallaby (Macropus agilis) the adult male is *warradjangkal* or *kornobolo*, the adult female is *merlbbe*, and the juvenile is *nakornborrh* (there is also a baby term, *nanjid*). The existence of such triple sets is familiar from English sets like *stallion/mare/foal* and *stag/doe/fawn*.

What these lists did not pick up, however, was the existence of an additional set of verbal terms for the distinctive hopping or gait of most macropod types, which extends in most cases to distinctive verbs for the male and female gaits. A subset of these terms is given in (1):