

A danger of exclusively emphasizing this motivation, however, is that some field linguists simply do not see the compiling of a comprehensive lexicon as part of their core interests—or, at best, see it as a chore rather than a research priority. For this reason, in this chapter I will concentrate on the advantages that interdisciplinary fieldwork can bring to our understanding of the workings of a central grammatical domain outside the specialist areas being directly investigated—event descriptors, typically verbs, that describe what can happen within a given word-world. These are not generally the primary target of investigation by interdisciplinary partners, but from the linguist's point of view are a central and puzzling part of the grammar-lexicon interface. I will show how the investigation of the verb lexicon can be advanced on many fronts, in large part to the rich data thrown up as a by-product of interdisciplinary work in other, targeted domains. ↵

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Map 8.1.



Location of Iwaidja in northern Australia

8.1.2 The Iwaidja language documentation project

The series of case studies in this chapter will draw on my experiences carrying out interdisciplinary fieldwork on Iwaidja (see Map 8.1), a non-Pama-Nyungan language of Croker Island and the Cobourg Peninsula, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Evans 2000a), now spoken by perhaps 150 people, though fewer than 30 still command the full richness of the language. Iwaidja speakers dwell in a region of great multilingualism, with an ideology that ties land to clan identity to distinctive linguistic varieties (see Evans 2010: 5–9).

Typically, Iwaidja speakers also know the closely related language Mawng⁵ from Goulburn Island (Capell and Hinch 1970; Singer 2007), the language Bininj Gun-wok⁶ (Evans 2003) from the Gunwinyguan family to the south which serves as a regional and ceremonial lingua franca, English, and—among the older people, though most such people have passed away in the last few years—one or more of the highly endangered other languages of the region (Ilgar, Amurdak). Though Iwaidja speakers have now adopted many of the material trappings of Western culture—motorboats, cars, houses, videos—traditional ceremonial life remains strong, drawing in the wide network of relationships of intermarriage and other ↵ kin ties that link people across scores of clans and dozens of languages in Western Arnhem Land.

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