8.4.1.1 Are concepts represented by nouns in other languages represented in Iwaidja by verbs instead or as well as nouns?

An affirmative answer to this question implies that, for some concepts at least, the meaning expressed by the sign is independent of its combinatorics, i.e. of whether it is a noun or a verb.

One part of the Iwaidja lexicon gives a clear 'yes' answer to this question: the kinship vocabulary. Alongside 'normal' nominal kin terms like *bunyi* 'father, father's brother' and *makamaka* '(paternal) aunt', Iwaidja has verbal kin terms like *mardyarrwun* 'be father or father's sibling of; be first-generation ascending patrilineal relative of' (see Evans 2000b; 2006a). These take the senior kin as their subject, and the junior kin as their object, and make explicit the fact that kinship terms are relational, two-place predicates. Note in passing that the English verb 'to father' is not a good parallel, for a variety of reasons: (a) it focusses on the act of begetting rather than the kinship relation; (b) it cannot be used with female subjects in the way *mardyarrwun* can in a word like *nganngamardyarrwun* 'my paternal aunt, lit. (the female such that) she is (like a) father to me'; (c) it does not generalize to other kin, so there is no English verb 'to paternal grandfather' comparable to the Iwaidja verb *ldakbaminy*.

p. 196 The semantic difference between nominal and verbal kin terms in Iwaidja is slight. It boils down to two main points:

(a) Kinship verbs have a wider range of referents—e.g. the verb *mardyarrwun* can have a man (father or father's brother) or a woman (father's sister) as subject, whereas the noun *bunyi* can only have a man as its referent. This is a general characteristic of kinship verbs that sometimes contrasts with kinship nouns but not always (e.g. in the grandparent generation both nouns and verbs span cross-sex sibling links), and it is not hard to find examples of kinship nouns in other Australian languages that exhibit comparable semantic ranges (e.g. in Kayardild the word *kajakaja* 'daddy' can also be used to refer to one's father's sister).

(b) Kinship verbs are always 'downward pointing', i.e. they have meanings like 'be older sibling to', 'be father to', or 'be grandparent to', but never 'be younger sibling to' or 'be child of'—though inflected verbs can achieve such reference by forming relative clauses off their objects: 'the one such that I am older sibling to her' for 'my younger sister'. By contrast, there are many nouns that designate kin relations from the junior perspective, such as *ngawiny* 'child of man'. This restriction to downward-pointing terms is unusual in systems of nominal kin terms, both cross-linguistically and in Australia, but is attested for Somali (Serzisko 1983).

Looking at the overall differences between nominal and verbal kin terms, then, they exist but are rather trivial and do not reflect different 'cuts' in the world. Rather, they are an economization of the verbal lexicon that takes advantage of two features of their inflectional potential which allow the number of lexemes to be reduced. The existence of a gender distinction for subject prefixes allows the difference between e.g. 'father' and 'paternal aunt' to be expressed inflectionally rather than by a different root (cf. *rimardyarrwun* 'his/her father', *ri-* 'he 〉 him/her', *kamardyarrwun* 'his/her paternal aunt', *ka-* 'she 〉 him/her'), and the possibility of forming referring expressions of either the subject or object allows either the senior or the junior kin term to be taken as referent, again allowing the system to get away with having just downward-pointing roots: *nganimardyarrwun* 'my father', lit. 'the one such that he is father to me' vs. *abardyarrwun* 'my son', lit. 'the one such that I am father to him'. For the realm of kinship, then, the decision about whether to encode as noun or verb does not appear to result in a significantly different conceptual structure.