

What Verse and Verbal Art Can Weave

chwilio am air a chael mwy to search for a word and find more
 (Iswlyn, as cited in Williams 1992:80)

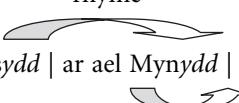
The epigraph of this chapter comes from a poem by the Welsh poet Islwyn, entitled “Gwel uwchlaw cymylaw amser” (“See above the clouds of time”). In it he describes how the challenge of working within a chosen set of complex formal templates – in his case the intricate rhymes and alliterative patterns of the bardic tradition – can lead poets to compressed mnemonic densities which they may not have found in the slack comfort zone of free form.

The bardic tradition has, in fact, played an important role right up to today in holding the Welsh language steady against the English tide. The graded ranks of bardic status are hotly coveted, and the bardic competitions or *eisteddfodau* confer heroic status on those who can maneuver their creations along the narrow path of its intricate alliteration schemes, known as *cynghanedd* (pronounced *kung-han-eth*).

Let us look briefly at two to examine their workings. *Cynghanedd* draws, literally “traversing *cynghanedd*,” divides each poetic line into three sections. A neutral middle section is removed, then within each alliterative rump all consonants except the last must match up, as in (1a) or (1b). I have capitalized the alliterated consonants to show it works.¹

- (1) a. DaGRau GWaéd | ar | DeG eiRy GWyn
 “tears of blood on fair white snow”²
- b. DRÚd | yr adwaenwn dy | DRÓ
 “I recognized your vain deceit”

A second scheme, *cynghanedd sain* or “sonorous *cynghanedd*,” combines alliteration with another device, internal rhyme. This chain-like structure links the first part of a line to the second by internal rhyme, and the middle part to the last by alliteration (as in 2a and 2b):

- rhyme
- 
- (2) a. gwell bêdd | a GoRwedd | GwíRion “better a grave and an innocent rest”
- alliteration
- rhyme
- 
- b. côrsydd | ar ael Mynydd | Mawr “fens on the brow of Great Mountain”
- alliteration

Across the logosphere, each language has developed its own special repertoire of curated styles – ranging from language-games, riddles, and rhyming duels to poetic or song forms and vast epics, not to mention the special registers of a language that may be acquired at initiation or used in ritual settings. The Welsh bardic tradition illustrates a universal valuation that takes creative mastery of special styles as the hallmark of an expert speaker, whose productions are savored and imitated, and whose intense and beautiful performances are regarded as the ultimate distillation of the culture’s achievements. Meanwhile, the tightly organized formal structures they deploy greatly assist memorization and transmission.

Extraordinary Language

*Aweten’ “Sū!” atsoi’ā.
“Solim’ ūmā’kan,” atsoi’ām.
Wi’men-makan,” atsoi’ām.
“Kōmā’ankano minsōm,” atsoi’ām.*

“Now then, enough!” said Earthmaker.
“There will be songs –
there will always be songs,
and all of you will have them.”

(Maidu myth from Dixon 1974:24, English translation from Shipley 1991)

In some areas, such as western Arnhem Land, every small clan group has at least one distinctive song style of its own (see figure 9.1). Each has its own characteristic didgeridoo accompaniment – and remember from chapter 1 that in Warramurrungunji’s heartland we are often talking about populations of fewer than a hundred people per language. There is even a special song cycle that systematically switches between three languages – Mawng, Kunwinjku, and Kunbarlang – as it describes the amorous night-time goings-on observed by a voyeuristic trilingual owl, who is said to have dictated the cycle to the Mawng song-man Balibalil.³

For members of each group, having their own distinctive style provides a public showcase of linguistic identity when performed at ceremonial gatherings such as funerals. It also ensures that each clan group is indispensable to the overall musical fabric, and will thus be guaranteed an invitation to perform at region-wide events. Against the modern backdrop of language endangerment, these songs also provide a powerful motivation for

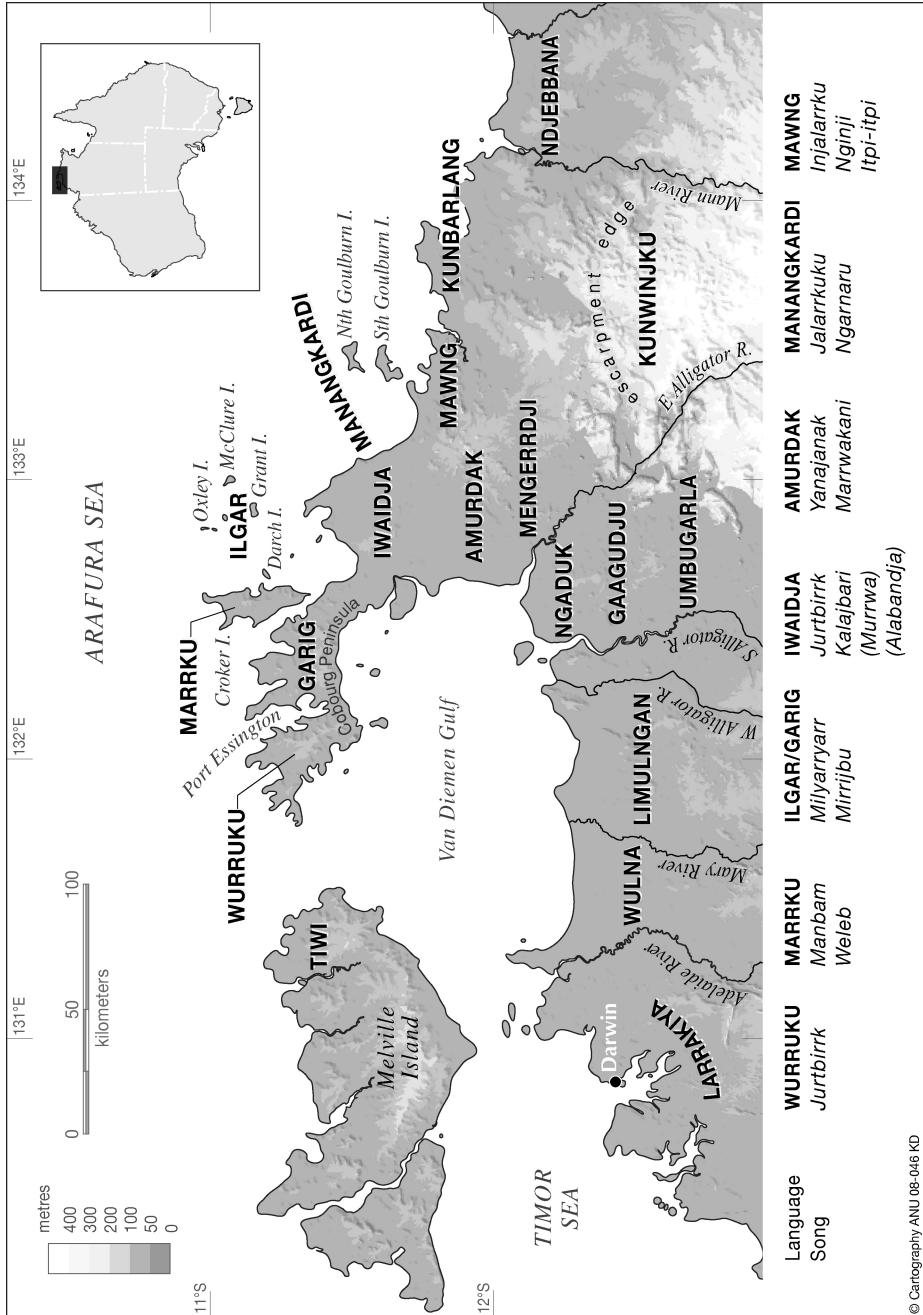


Figure 9.1 Languages and song types in western Arnhem Land

younger people to learn their own linguistic traditions. During the Iwaidja documentation project, many young men on Croker Island, who had sometimes been diffident about using the spoken language, showed themselves to be passionately interested in learning their clan songs.

Given all this, members of small speech communities naturally assume that linguists, in their quest for the essence of their language, will place special value on these higher forms. And in fact those two great universal linguists Edward Sapir and Roman Jakobson explicitly argued for the inseparability of “poetics” – the study of what makes verbal messages works of art – from the rest of linguistics. As Jakobson put it: “the linguist whose field is any kind of language may and must include poetry in his study.”⁴

Yet all too often contemporary linguists turn back from the bardic threshold, as if these higher forms of speech – through their leap into art, away from the realm of regular abilities like normal speech, which all children simply learn without effort – are no longer a core concern of linguistic inquiry.⁵

In this chapter I shall follow Jakobson’s affirmation that linguistics and poetics are inextricably intertwined, while continuing the theme of how language and cultural systems coevolve. The concerns of the verbal artist with form, semantic subtlety, and the power of intricate literary architecture may be conscious, unconscious, or semi-conscious, but they always strive to convey more than normal words allow. Paul Friedrich, an anthropological linguist who moved back and forth between the canons of Russian literature and the improvisations of Tarascan village poets in Mexico, puts it well in his book *The Language Parallax*:

the medium of poetry can enable one to simultaneously constellate personal and general, subjective and objective statements in order to handle situations or realities that are simply too subtle or complicated or multidimensional to be dealt with succinctly in any other way; in brief, one job that a poem often can do better than a discursive statement is to distill gist.
(Friedrich 1986:5)

In non-literate traditions, multiple performances of the same work offer the chance to gradually improve “oral drafts.” We have already encountered some impressive specimens of how speakers of polysynthetic languages build up whole sentences’ worth of material into a single complex verbal word. But, as Marianne Mithun has remarked for Mohawk,⁶ the most elaborated examples do not just come out cold – they are found in texts that master-speakers have successively polished and elaborated through numerous retellings.

Let’s think back to our earlier take on Borges’ Library of Babel. So far in this book we have been exploring those library wings that hold grammars and dictionaries of obscure languages, or the variant manuscripts of the careless scribes from which a language’s genealogy and history can be deduced. Now it is time to reward ourselves for these sometimes arid pursuits, and look at some of the masterpieces composed across the neglected languages of our horizon, by the oral equivalents of Cervantes, Du Fu, and Basho, transcribed from their spoken traditions in appropriate notations to take their place on the Library’s shelves.

Carving with the Grain

Some forms of verbal art – verse, song or chant – depend crucially on morphological and phonological, even syntactic properties of the language in which it is formed. In such cases, the art could not exist without the language, quite literally.

(Hale 1998:204)

Like the great works of written literature, the poetic architecture of oral masterpieces is intimately tied up with the form of the languages they are composed in, following the lines of cleavage given by their phonology. The raw material that different languages supply affects how poetry is organized. Do we match word-finals (rhyme) or word-initials (alliteration)? Do we measure out lines by stress, by quantity (e.g. syllables), or by tone? And of course it is possible to combine these elements in different ways.

Classical Chinese poetry, for example, had roughly eight hundred patterns known as *ci* (詞). Each was a structural template of tones and rhymes, associated with its own theme or mood, into which the poet would set words by *tian ci* (填詞) (“filling out a (*ci*) pattern”). It is the manuals or “rhyme tables” compiled to help poets write *ci*, incidentally, that give us our best insights into early Chinese phonology. And you will remember that the adaptation of this tradition by Tangut speakers left us with the keys, nearly a thousand years later, to decipher their mysterious script, thanks to their adaptation of the Chinese rhyme-table tradition to describe the sounds of their own language.

But while the patterns for weaving verse vary – in such multifarious ways that we have yet to achieve anything like a cross-linguistic synthesis of poetic styles – what remains constant is their intricacy and the valuing of verbal artistry.

For many unsung tribal geniuses, only a tiny audience can appreciate their verbal art, tied up as it is with the tissues and ligaments of a language spoken by just a few people. Consider Anna Nelson Harry, whom Mike Krauss has ranked as an “Eyak Shakespeare,” telling her vividly worded stories for the last few remaining Eyak speakers, or an Iwaidja Basho like David Minjumak, composing brief, achingly evocative *Jurtbirrk* lyrics⁷ whose subtlety can be savored only with the knowledge of Iwaidja found among at most a hundred people. Nonetheless, the glimpses we can snatch from outside show how much richer our world’s literary universe is than even the most inclusive and erudite compilation of comparative literatures would indicate – filled with fresh figures of speech, intricate metrical devices, genres as small as haiku and as large as a Homeric epic. Much of this creation is forged in the heat of improvisation and performance, embroidering inspired riffs on a noble old garment, bringing together feats of memory and creativity in equal measure.

A terminological problem I have been dodging so far is what to call the special forms of language we are looking at in this chapter. “Oral literature” is the name sometimes used to cover those productions of oral societies that most resemble our notion of literature, like songs, chanted epics, and traditional stories. But it is not a perfect term. Although some of the language material we are dealing with here is in fact literature, in the literal sense of being written, its traditions of commentary and translation are confined to the

much more fragile route of oral tradition, and these aspects are often little known, with documentary work urgently needed: the epics and historical chronicles of the Bugis and Makassarese peoples of Sulawesi in Indonesia, which I mentioned in chapter 7, are an example of such a literary/oral hybrid.

The term *oral literature* also risks downplaying the interesting question of what difference it makes, in aesthetics and formal organization, when an oral tradition becomes written. This set of questions is often investigated under the banner of *ethnopoetics*, which Richard Bauman has defined as “the aesthetic patterning of oral literary forms and the problems of translating and rendering them in print in such a way that the artfulness of their performance is not lost.”⁸ Many investigators employ the term *verbal art* for what is being studied here. Others use the term *comparative literature*, which has the advantage of promoting the value of oral traditions alongside more familiar canons. But the preconceptions we have about what is included in “literature” may make us neglect other sorts of extra-ordinary language use, which, although cleverly curated and out of the ordinary, are not exactly literary or artistic. An example is the special initiation language Damin, which I will discuss at the end of the chapter. This, too, is clearly a conscious creation, although its interest is not so much literary or artistic as philosophical.

Improbable Bards and Epic Debates: the Singers of Montenegro

πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἵδεν ὄστεα
καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
πολλὰ δὲ γένι πόντῳ πάθεν ὄλγεα
ὄν κατὰ θυμόν
ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον
‘εταιρῶν.

Many were the men whose cities he saw and
whose mind he learned, aye,
and many the woes he suffered in his heart
upon the sea,
seeking to win his own life and the return of
his comrades.

(Homer, *The Odyssey*, I:iii–v, translated by A. T. Murray)

The founding masterpiece of western literature is Homer’s pair of epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. One impetus driving the early development of linguistic study among the Greeks was a concern to understand Homeric language, the better to preserve it, as it was already archaic by the time they had developed an alphabet able to stabilize and preserve the double masterpiece.⁹ This raises a central question, which has arisen again and again since ancient times, and which perches on the conventional line between literature and lore: could such a complex and densely wrought epic have been composed through any means but writing? Could its creator really have made it up as he went along?

A related question concerns its authorship, given that it so far antedated the beginning of reliable written records: was it really composed by a single person, traditionally the blind old bard whom Homer writes into the fabric of the epic itself as Demodocus? Or is the identity “Homer” simply a conventional label for the accumulated labors of a tag team of oral composers over centuries, each adding new episodes and figures? This latter view would explain the existence of various inconsistencies, and the presence of different dialect

forms and archaisms from different periods. It is also more consistent with our knowledge that Greek writing did not exist at the time the Homeric poems were composed around the ninth century BC.

But if the Homeric epics were composed orally, their incredible length poses an explanatory challenge to the known bounds of human memory. Even the longest versions of oral traditions known up to the early twentieth century, such as the Finnish *Kalevala*, came nowhere near the Homeric epics in length, making experts skeptical that they could have been composed and transmitted by oral tradition alone.

In the 1920s the American scholar Milman Parry began his studies in Paris, following the hypothesis that the Homeric epics preserved an oral tradition that predated any written literature in Greek.¹⁰ His first move was to study the *formulaic epithets* – “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.”¹¹ These formulae, it had been suggested, win time for the bard while he composes the next couple of lines, and are hence a hallmark of oral performance. In support of the bardic-tradition view, Parry found that more than a third of the lines in Homer occur more than once¹² – like the formula in the epigraph above, ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν (“the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea”).

Parry’s doctoral supervisor was the great Caucasologist George Dumézil, whom we met in Turkey in chapter 3 working on Ubykh with Tevfik Esenç. One of Dumézil’s interests was to understand the cosmology of the early Indo-Europeans through fieldwork on the languages and oral traditions of peoples, like those of the Caucasus, whom he believed to have conserved practices paralleling those of the ancient Indo-Europeans. Parry realized that the Homeric authorship question could only be resolved by a fieldwork-based existence proof, and set out to find a contemporary Homer in some part of the world that still maintained the ancient bardic traditions:

the aim of the study was to fix with exactness the form of oral story poetry, to see wherein it differs from the form of written story poetry. Its method was to observe singers working in a thriving tradition of unlettered song and see how the form of their songs hangs upon their having to learn and practice their art without reading and writing. (Milman Parry, quoted in Lord 2000:3)

Parry had originally wanted to work in Central Asia, but Soviet permission to go there was out of the question for an American fieldworker during the Stalinist 1930s. In the end he set off on a recording expedition to Montenegro in Yugoslavia from 1933 to 1935, accompanied by his student assistant Albert Lord. Suitable technology for capturing real performances in the field was just being developed, although it was still cumbersome. Parry needed to transport over half a ton of aluminium discs through the mountains of Montenegro, and since each one only ran for a couple of minutes, he had to commission a special recording device that allowed him to toggle between two turntables so as to capture long unbroken runs. Parry recorded performances from a number of singers – and sometimes the same song several times from the same singer – singing in what was then called Serbo-Croatian.¹³ He also interviewed tale-singers about their lifetime careers,

and how they learned, memorized, and composed. Parry and Lord gradually became acquainted with the league of Montenegrin bards, often by sponsoring performances in the coffee shops of small dusty towns still redolent of centuries of Turkish rule. One day they discovered Avdo Međedović (see figure 9.2), an illiterate peasant farmer, around 65 years of age:

Finally Avdo came and he sang for us old Salih's favorite of the taking of Bagdad in the days of Sultan Selim. We listened with increasing interest to this short homely farmer, whose throat was disfigured by a large goiter. He sat cross-legged on the bench, sawing the *gusle*, swaying in rhythm with the music. He sang very fast, sometimes deserting the melody, and while the bow went lightly back and forth over the string, he recited the verses at the top speed. A crowd gathered. A card game, played by some of the modern young men of the town noisily kept on, but was finally broken up.

The next few days were a revelation. Avdo's songs were longer and finer than any we had heard before. He could prolong one for days, and some of them reached fifteen or sixteen thousand lines. Other singers came, but none could equal Avdo, our Yugoslav Homer. (Lord 2000:xii)

Avdo Međedović's performances, comparable in length to the Homeric epics, finally established without doubt that talented bards were capable of astonishing feats of memory. Scholarly skepticism about these capacities, it now appears, stemmed from a fundamental reconfiguration of human ability when we cross the threshold of literacy: even as books are opening up other minds and worlds to us, the stability of preservation and access they now afford lets us demand less of our memories.

In a preliterate society human memory is the only archive – what we forget is gone forever. Just as the human invention of culture released genes from a heavy burden of information transmission, so the invention of writing released us from the duty of memory – whether “us” refers to our individual minds or to the cultures whose practices vivify, order, turn over, and reinforce what is held in them. Our ability to remember then rapidly withers. My Aboriginal language teachers are repeatedly astonished when I fail to remember, for example, the pairing of a bush and a name they have given me for it a

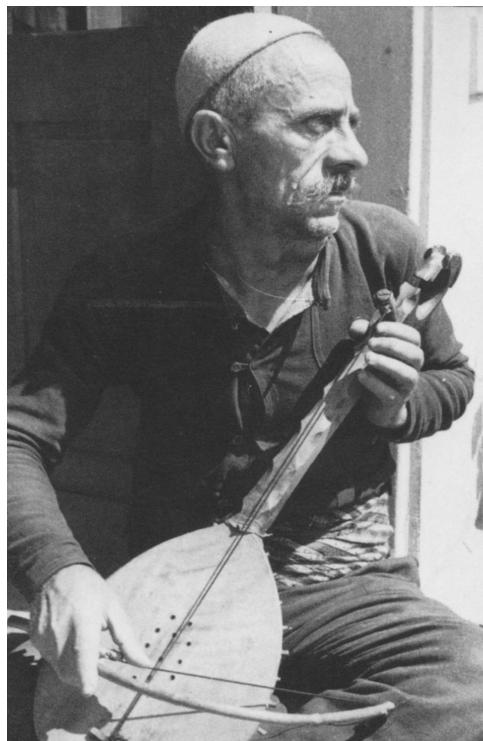


Figure 9.2 Avdo Međedović

month or a few years ago. “I already bin show you this one before” they say, with an expression suggesting I should be struck from the list of recognized linguistic practitioners. And I once heard of an Aboriginal mother who was reluctant to let her daughter learn to read and write because of her fear that this would atrophy her memory.

Besides demonstrating the feasibility of staging such epic performances from memory, Parry and Lord found striking similarities to Homer in the use of formulae by Avdo and other singers. “The formula is the offspring of the marriage of thought and sung verse,”¹⁴ they found, since these repetitions facilitate sung composition. Sometimes these formulae marked stages in the action, sometimes with slight variations (3a, 3b); at other times they would frame the time of the action (4a to 4c). The toolbox of formulaic variants assists the bard because, according to need, they can plug the first half of a line (4a), its second half (4b), or all of it (4):

- (3) a. *Jalah reče, posede đogina*
“By Allah,” he said, he mounted the white horse.
 - b. *Jalah reče, posede hajvana*
“By Allah,” he said, he mounted the animal.
- (4) a. *a na kuli* “in the tower”
 - b. *na bijeloj kuli* “in the white tower”
 - c. *na bijeloj od kamena kuli* “in the white tower of stone”

Parry and Lord’s fieldwork with these living bards gives a direct insight into how Homer would have worked: learning massive stretches from previous singers, adding material of his own, drawing on a rich personal stock of formulae to play for on-line creative time, and lengthening, shortening, or updating the tale according to the occasion – “the singer of tales is at once the tradition and an individual creator.”¹⁵ The virtuosity of Avdo Međedović invites us to rethink our notions of literary creativity:

A culture based upon the printed book, which has prevailed from the Renaissance until lately, has bequeathed to us – along with its immeasurable riches – snobberies which ought to be cast aside. We ought to take a fresh look at tradition, considered not as the inert acceptance of a fossilized corpus of themes and conventions, but as an organic habit of re-creating what has been received and is handed on. It may be that we ought to re-examine the concept of originality, which is relatively modern as a shibboleth of criticism; there may be other and better ways of being original than that concern for the writer’s own individuality which characterizes so much of our self-conscious fiction. (Lord 2000:xxx)

Parry and Lord’s study came at just the right historical moment. Even ten years earlier the technology to record such long performances did not exist. And by the later part of the twentieth century bards of this caliber were no longer to be found, at least in Montenegro. The inexorable forward march of literacy has hobbled people’s capacity for such feats of memory, and the globalization of entertainment has rapidly eroded the patronage given to such local performers.

But other researchers would pursue these epic wanderings along pathways worthy of Odysseus' travels. Despite Parry and Lord's demonstration that the bard himself could be illiterate, there remained scholars who adopted a fallback position: that even though individual performers could not read or write, the actual literary form of the epic was tied to at least a regional awareness of literacy, which would allow the filtering of elaborated written models for the Homers and Medžedovićes to adapt. Epics, on the view espoused by scholars like Ruth Finnegan and Dennis Tedlock, would never be found beyond the outer reaches of the literate world:

When we look at cultures known to have been free of alphabetic or syllabic writing, not only African and Amerindian but also Chinese, we find no epic. Wherever we find epic today, in Islamic Africa, in Central and Southeast Asia, in the Balkans, it always exists within a literate tradition that uses alphabetic or syllabic writing, and the oral versions, *though sometimes performed by individuals who are themselves illiterate*, always exist in close proximity to written versions. (Tedlock 1983:250, italics added)

Dennis Tedlock, the author of this passage, could hardly be labeled a narrowly Eurocentric scholar. A student of Mayan ethnopoetics, he has written thoughtfully about the problems involved in catching the magic of oral performances in written form, and has produced a masterly translation of the Mayan cosmological epic known as the *Popol Vuh* or *Book of the Mat*,¹⁶ whose momentous feel you can gauge from the excerpt below.

*V cah tzucuxic, v cah xucutaxic,
retaxic, v cah cheexic,
v mehcamaxic, v yuccamaxic.
“V pa cah, v pa vleu
cah tzuc, cah xucut”,
chughaxic rumal ri tzacol, bitol,
v chuch, v cahau gazlem, vinaquirem:
abanel, guxlanel,
alay rech, guxlaay rech zaquil amaqwil,
zaquil al, zaquil gahol;
ahbiz, ahnaoh chirech ronohel
ato, gol-vi cah,
vleu, cho, palo.*

the fourfold siding, fourfold cornering,
measuring, fourfold staking,
halving the cord, stretching the cord
in the sky, on the earth,
the four sides, the four corners,
as it is said, by the Maker, Modeler,
mother-father of life, of humankind,
giver of breath, giver of heart,
bearer, upbringer in the light that lasts
of those born in the light, begotten in the light;
worrier, knower of everything,
whatever there is:
sky-earth, lake-sea

(*Popol Vuh*,¹⁷ Tedlock 1996:63–4)

The *Popol Vuh* comes from the northwestern end of the Mayan world, in what is now Guatemala, and was composed in Quiché (K'ichee'). It was originally written in giant illustrated Mayan books employing the writing system we met in chapter 7. When the Spaniards encountered these marvels of New-World literature in the sixteenth century they made every effort to destroy them. Only four volumes in this genre have survived – three that were removed to Europe by Cortes and others (the so-called Dresden, Madrid, and Paris codices), and a fourth found in 1966 by looters in a dry cave in the Chiapas.

While they were destroying the originals, however, the Spanish taught Mayan nobles to write their languages in an adapted form of the Latin alphabet, so as to produce Mayan translations of Christian prayers and sermons. But very soon these students adapted the new tool to write down their own founding religious texts – thereby leaving us “a literary legacy that is both more extensive than the surviving hieroglyphic corpus and more open to understanding”¹⁸ – although its existence was carefully kept secret from the Spaniards. However, between 1701 and 1703, in Chichicastenango, friar Francisco Ximénez happened to get a look at one of these manuscripts while he was serving as parish priest, and he made the only surviving copy of the Quiché text of the *Popol Vuh*, adding to it a Spanish translation. Thanks to this politically complex series of events we now have various versions – hieroglyphic Mayan, Latin-transcribed Quiché, and Spanish, plus the English translation cited above – which indubitably establish the existence of a great epic tradition in the Americas as well as in the Old World.¹⁹ But, importantly for our debate, it is again a product of a literate world, that of pre-Columbian hieroglyphic writing. Tedlock, long immersed in both the oral and written traditions of the Quiché, explains why he sees literacy as a prerequisite for the emergence of epics:

The measuring out of long runs of lines with equal numbers of syllables, moras, or feet does not occur in audible texts from cultures whose verbal arts are not under the direct influence of literary traditions. In most languages, such fine-grained metrical schemes require an atomization of speech sounds that is precisely the forte of alphabetic and syllabic writing systems. (Tedlock 1983:250, note 12)

This formulation expresses a widely held viewpoint about how much conscious “metalinguistic” awareness people have of the structure of their language: that without exposure to literacy, and the dissociation that this brings between integral words and individual speech sounds, humans are incapable of working with the complex phonological concepts needed to construct meters and fit lines to them. But is this actually true, or is it one more unfounded prejudice of modern literate cultures?

There are two grounds for being skeptical about the above formulation. First, we know that language-games in preliterate cultures regularly play on metalinguistic awareness of various units, such as syllables in the case of Arrernte Rabbit Talk, or tonal patterns in the case of Ibibio erotic riddles. So the claim that one needs writing to develop a metalinguistic awareness of these units is ill founded.

Second, just because literates are capable of being analytically aware of phonological units when they are thinking like linguists does not mean they do this when engaged in artistic creation. To be sure, sometimes they are quite explicit about the reasoning behind their architecture. Dante, in planning his *Divine Comedy*, consciously reflected the centrality of the number three in Christian imagery – the Trinity of the Godhead, and the three realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. He allegorically organized its hundred cantos into three books of thirty-three (plus an introduction), and even invented a new rhyme scheme, his famous *terza rima* (triple rhyme), to bring the rule of three down to the verse level. But this does not mean poets in literate cultures are always so conscious of what they do – as we will now see.

The Case of Khlebnikov's Grasshopper

Language is rough drafts for poetry,
just as poetry is “the blazoned book of language”

(Friedrich 1986:35)

Verbal art can also help us understand one of the great mysteries of language evolution – the incessant emergence of complex patterning, often with no conscious planning. Roman Jakobson, whom I mentioned earlier, once wrote a fascinating essay²⁰ examining how far poets are conscious of the phonological structures they create. It focuses on the Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov’s poem “The grasshopper,” composed in 1908, and in particular on its first, crucial sentence:

<p>Крылышкуя золотописьмом тончайших жил Кузнецик в кузов пуга уложил Прибрежных много трав и вер.</p>	<p><i>Krylyškúja zolotopis'móm tončajšíx žíl Kuznécik v kúzov púza uložil Pribréžnyx mnógo tráv i vér.</i></p>
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Winging with its gold script of veins most fine,
 The grasshopper packed his hollow gut
 With many foreign weeds and faiths.²¹

In Russian this poem has a hypnotic, dreamlike perfection, due in part to the almost unbelievable mathematical symmetry of its phonetic makeup. Although he had been unaware of it at the time of writing, Khlebnikov realized years later that

each of the sounds *k*, *r*, *l*, and *u* occurs five times “without any wish of the one who wrote this nonsense” (*pomimo želanija napisavšego ètot vzdor*) and thus joined all those poets who acknowledged that a complex verbal design may be inherent in their work irrespective of their apprehension and volition . . . – to use William Blake’s testimony “without Premeditation and even against my Will.” (Jakobson 1987b:251)

I have bolded the *k*, double-underlined the *u*, and italicized the *r* in the transliteration above to make them easier to find. But the formal symmetries do not stop here, since Jakobson discovered even more fivefold recurrences – which the poet himself did not notice at the time of writing the above! The initial word *krylyškúja* is a neologism, derived from the word *krylyško* (“little wing”), thus meaning “small-winged.” Stripping away its suffix *-ja* to leave the neologistic three-syllabled stem *krylyškú-*, Jakobson noticed that this word contains each of the sounds participating in the “five-fold structuration” of the first sentence: five *k*, five *r*, five *l*, five *u*, as well as five “hushing” sibilants (ž, š)²² that Khlebnikov had failed to notice even the second time around. In the transliteration I’ve also underlined the occurrences of ž (pronounced like *zh* in *Zhivago*) and š (pronounced *sh*).

The opening word thus projects a set of fivefold phonological proportions that vault out the poem's whole first sentence. Moreover, the ten stressed vowels group themselves into balanced sets of five, whichever of two alternate criteria they are grouped by:

five rounded vs. five unrounded (i.e. [3 ú + 2 ó] vs. [3 é + 2 í]), and
 five high vs. five mid ([3 ú + 2 í] vs. [3 é + 2 ó]).

On the basis of this example – where even a literate and metalinguistically tuned-in poet like Khlebnikov could construct an interlocked set of alliterative constraints without any awareness of having done so – Jakobson concludes that

phonology and grammar of oral poetry offer a system of complex and elaborate correspondences which come into being, take effect, and are handed down through generations without anyone's cognizance of the rules governing this intricate network . . . Intuition may act as the main or, not seldom, even sole designer of the complicated phonological and grammatical structures in the writings of individual poets. (Jakobson 1987b:261)

Is it possible that the lofty bard's-eye view for patterning latent in a language, crystallized into poetic form, can end up influencing not just the literature composed in it, but even the language itself? We still have virtually no idea, in fact, how far there is feedback from the more curated forms of language into everyday speech.

It is striking how often linguists invoke criteria from out-of-the-ordinary language as evidence for a particular analysis – from syllables, to rhymes, to semantic groupings. Personally I believe that linguists' arguments are mostly just reproducing, consciously, what native speakers work out for themselves unconsciously, and linguists' "tests" for identifying particular units or relations are merely formalizations of grouping principles that speakers are unconsciously aware of anyway. If this is true, then the emergence of a particular special device in oral literature – a new language-game cutting syllables a particular way, or a new type of alliteration, or a new metrical template in poetry – can actually nudge the whole language system in a particular direction by adding another cookie-cutter for speakers to use on the dough of the speech around them. It is for this reason that a coevolutionary framework is helpful in studying verbal art: it reminds us that the impact of artistic creativity does not stop at the work itself, but flows on to the rest of the language system.

Unsung Bards of the New Guinea Highlands

Kanab taka nyiba mudupa e
Kanab take taka nyiba e

As I see, it quietly reports itself,
 as I see, quietly, quietly it speaks
 (Tom Yaya Kange narrative, in Rumsey 2001:208)²³

The metalinguistic facility attested by language-games on the one hand, and the importance of unconscious creative patterning even in highly literate poets like Khlebnikov on

the other, suggest that it is an overstatement to see literacy as a prerequisite for the development of metrically structured forms. But what would really decide the issue would be to find a culture that clearly lacked either literacy itself or any contact with an outside literate tradition, yet nonetheless possesses its own tradition of large-scale metrical narratives.

The linguistic anthropologist Alan Rumsey has recently done just that, working with peoples of New Guinea who possess a tradition of sung tales known as *Tom Yaya Kange* in the Ku Waru language of the Western Highlands Province. These contain the same structural elements found in epics like the *Odyssey*, the *Popol Vuh*, or the Montenegrin tradition, but in an area that irrefutably lacked any contact with literate traditions until very recently.

The New Guinea Highlands were the last densely populated region on earth to become known to Europeans. When Australian explorers finally “discovered” this region in the 1930s they were amazed to find hundreds of thousands of highland farmers. Although the people were exotic in their armed, feathered near-nakedness, villages and hamlets stretched across a landscape that was almost Bavarian in its picturesque rural orderliness, with fenced, irrigated mountainside fields. It would be wrong to suggest this population had remained completely isolated from the rest of the world – over the millennia they had adopted pigs and new root crops from the Austronesians along the coasts, through the mediation of intermediate groups. But they certainly represent an almost completely independent cultural tradition, and one that has remained entirely separate from the nearby world of Asian maritime empires and their literate cultures. The oldest practitioners of *Tom Yaya Kange* were already adults, and well launched in their poetic craft, when they first encountered people writing.

Tom Yaya Kange are metrical narratives, themed on the romance of exogamy, with a young hero who must roam far and overcome many obstacles before finding a wife. A well-defined line structure is established by regular stepwise alternation between pitch levels plus added overlong vowels at the end of each line. There is also extensive use of parallelism, a standard set of literary tropes known as *ung eke* (“bent speech”), and recurrent formulae of the type we have seen in Homer and the Yugoslavian epics.

Neat correlative formulations adorn the performances. The perfect proportion of female beauty in this culture – big eyes and big nose – is expressed in the Ku Waru language by the doublet formula *kubin topa mong wali jirim e, mongn topa kubi kelin jirim e* (“the nose makes the eye



Figure 9.3 Paulus Korts performing *Tom Yaya Kange*, 2004²⁴ (photo: courtesy of Don Niles)

(appear) small, the eye makes the nose (appear) small”). And just as Homer makes overt reference to an inspiring muse beyond his conscious creative power – “sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story,” goes one English translation – *Tom Yaya Kange* singers employ parallel formulations to capture the feeling of the story “telling itself” as they mentally watch the action they are depicting: “as I see, it quietly reports itself; as I see, quietly, quietly it speaks.”

A rough idea of the flavor of *Tom Yaya Kange* verse can be gained from the following excerpt, performed by a tale-chanter called Kopia Noma:²⁵

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| (5) | a. <i>kang mel we mel kaniyl e</i> | Though the tiniest slip of a lad |
| | b. <i>kang mai pup yaka nyirim e</i> | That boy strode from perch to perch |
| | c. <i>kang komunga mong yaka nyirim e</i> | That boy strode from mountain to mountain |
| | d. <i>ukuni yabu tobu midi nyirim e</i> | He wanted to slay the Ukuni |
| | e. <i>kobulka yabu tobu midi nyirim,</i> | He wanted to slay the Kobulka |
| | f. <i>kang mel we mel kaniyl e</i> | Though the tiniest slip of a lad |
| | g. <i>kang pidi-tap mel kaniyl e</i> | Who'd been ignored since he was born |
| | h. <i>pilyini kub nai-ko, nyirim e</i> | And who's ever heard such a tale? |
| | i. <i>kanuni kub nai-ko nyirim e</i> | And who's ever seen such a thing? |

But to appreciate their poetic structure, we need to understand a bit more about the meter and the larger-scale interaction of verse lines with melody. In the version just given each line is organized into six feet, whose length are held constant no matter how many syllables need to be squashed into them. The monosyllabic *mel* of *kang mel* in line (a), the disyllabic *pidi* of *kang pidi* in line (g), and the trisyllabic *komunga* of *kang komunga* in line (c) are all timed to the same length, rather like the “vanishing foot” in English poetry. Each line has an overall pitch contour starting low, rising to high in the middle of the line, and dropping back by its end. Other performers cast their verse into somewhat different molds: another singer, Koj (Paulus Konts), uses lines of five feet rather than six, with a higher-level melodic cycle of eight-line verses split into pairs of four-line groups.

Field investigations of a tradition like this need to proceed on two fronts. First they need to record, transcribe, translate, and metrically analyze actual performances, or the fragile tradition is lost forever – itself no mean task, in a language still lacking a full dictionary or grammar, and for long tales chanted at high speed and sometimes exceeding a thousand lines. But to understand how the tradition is maintained and elaborated, through constantly repeated fusions of memorization and re-creativity, it is also necessary to record a number of well-known performers, compare their individual styles, and interview them about their performing histories and their methods of composition and performance. To achieve this, Rumsey and his colleagues organized special “Chanted Tales” workshops, which have winkled out performers from across a broad region of the Highlands and done much to assure the continued prestige and liveliness of this tradition. Although the surface of this independent epic tradition has so far just been scratched, it has already established beyond doubt that there are Papuan as well as Yugoslav Homers. We must now definitively accord,

to talented individuals in preliterate cultures, the ability to compose massive and metrically structured epics without the benefit of writing or editing.

No Spice, No Savor

Poetry is of so subtle a spirit, that, in pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate

(John Denham 1656, in the preface to his translation of the second Aeneid)

I mentioned earlier that each language elaborates a set of compact devices that give the stories and poems told in it a particular flavor and cast. Within the western tradition, for example, many of the special characteristics of Russian literature have been linked to specific linguistic features. An example is the use of the grammatical device known as *verbal aspect* to plant the reader directly in the unfolding narrative – giving that characteristic feeling of being tossed on the wave of the moment that we get reading Dostoyevsky – and the use of a whole range of grammatical devices that economically express the characters' powerlessness in the face of an unstoppable fate.²⁶

Masterful speakers use these compact grammatical techniques to color their audience's reactions to characters and events in vivid ways that are impossible to translate without sounding cumbersomely explicit – and also to give savor to ordinary conversation. Consider a set of verbal modifications from the Nootka language of Vancouver Island, now more usually known as Nuu-Chah-Nulth. These were described in a classic article by Edward Sapir in 1915, at a time when the Nootka oratorical tradition was still thriving. Each of these affixes, when added to a word like *qwís-ma'* ("he does so") or *hín-t'-ciL-we'in'* ("he comes, it is said"), emphasizes some abnormal features of the hearer or referent, as shown in table 9.1.

Various affixes and other types of modification – shown in bold in table 9.1 – are used to denote abnormal features of the hearer or referent. In addition to those shown in the

Table 9.1 Some Nootka “abnormality” markers

Affix	Meaning	Example	Translation
-'is	diminutive – “dear little”	<i>qwís-is'-ma'</i>	“he does so, the little one”
-aq'	augmentative	<i>hín-t'-ciL-aq'-we'in'</i>	“he comes, the fatty, it is said”
-'is plus palatalization of sibilants	abnormal diminutive	<i>hín-t'-siL-is'-we'in'</i>	“he, little man, comes, they say”
-'is plus replacement of sibilants by lateral fricatives ²⁷	eye defect	<i>qwíł -ił'-ma'</i>	“he does so, the squinty / cross-eyed / sore-eyed one”

Box 9.1 Animal language in Ceq Wong (Malaysia)²⁸


Kapiyat Patong of Kula Gandah in Malaysia (photo: Nicole Kruspe)

Ceq Wong speakers believe that all creatures are really human and speak Ceq Wong, but that we hear them through our human ears with different “dialects.” These are manifested by making distinctive changes to the speech of each species. When long-tailed macaque monkeys talk, for example, the prefix *ruj* is added to the beginning of each word (displacing all but the last syllable), and the vowel of the remaining syllable is nasalized (shown by the tilde above the vowel). The following speech is from a narrative by Kapiyat Patong about a lazy long-tailed Macaque son-in-law, who was making excuses for his misbehavior; it is told by Kapiyat Patong of Kula Gandah in Malaysia. The top line gives the Macaque version; the second line its rendition in ordinary human speech.

?u-rupyāh	runjā?	runçīh	ruñhū?	ruñmō?
?u-liyah	ja?	cīh	jhū?	tramo?
it-fell.off	we	fell	tree	tree.type

“It fell off (when) I was felling the teramo? tree.”

table, there are distinct modifications for referring to hunchbacks, lame people, left-handed people, circumcised males, and greedy people.

Many of these have special additional uses in myth, based on particular stereotyped features of particular animal characters. The “eye defect” form is used to refer to the Deer (said to have weeping eyes) and to the Mink. The “left-handed” form is used to refer to the Bear, considered to be left-handed, and the “greedy” form for the Raven, noted for his gluttony. These forms can then be used to track the actions of these mythical characters through the narrative, without naming them explicitly. (See box 9.1 for another, Malaysian, example of special animal talk in storytelling.)

At the other end of the twentieth century, Tony Woodbury decided to investigate empirically how far a culture’s central expressive vehicles get narrowed when they shift away from their traditional language. He decided to focus on how far the availability of such shorthand coloration devices influences the inclusion of information of this type, but based on a language far north of Nootka, namely Central Alaskan Cup’ik Eskimo (here I’ll just call it Cup’ik for short, pronounced *CHOOP-pick*). Cup’ik, like Nootka, has a battery of compact “affective” devices, though compared to the Nootka ones they are tender rather than mean: *-rurlur-* (“poor dear one”), *-ksaga(r)-* (“darned”), *-rrlugar-* (“funky”), *-llerar-* (“shabby old”). They can go either on nouns (e.g. *cavilquksagaat*, “darned strips of metal”) or on verbs, in which case they apply to the subject of the action: *maqicurlagciteksagarciaakut-ll-am* (“the darned (one) might ruin our bath”).

Woodbury hypothesized that, because these suffixes stand out less than independent words do, they could be used more often without diminishing the aesthetic effect by sounding overdone. In English we do not like to reuse whole words too frequently – “the poor dear girl went outside and then poor dear she started shivering” sounds repetitive. But repeated grammatical affixes do not bother us: we do not even notice if we repeat the verb inflection *-s* in “she comes outside and then starts shivering.” Thanks to this effect, repeated uses of a suffix like *-lurlur-* should be able to slip under the radar, building up a resonant coloring effect without sounding clunky.

To see if there would in fact be differences between Cup’ik and English storytelling, Woodbury carried out an experiment to “test the fate of given features of the Cup’ik under different conditions of interlinguistic performance.” In 1978 he recorded a traditional myth or *quliraq* from Leo Moses in his home in Chevak, Alaska, first in Cup’ik then in English (see figure 9.4).

Some years later, Woodbury played the Cup’ik original back to Moses, section by section, and got him to give a running translation/interpretation for a second tape recorder. Leo Moses, 45 years old at the time of the first telling, was not just a master storyteller himself, but was widely recognized for his skills as an interpreter. So “his renderings must be seen . . . as instances of performed interlinguistic mediation by a skilled, methodical practitioner making creative choices that draw on mature narrative abilities in both languages.”²⁹

The myth concerns a champion young hunter who is blinded by his grandmother so as to cut down his catch. When loons on a nearby lake restore his sight he thanks them by painting them in the colors they now have, goes off to win as his wife the daughter of another famous hunter, and eventually returns home with her to find his grandmother



Figure 9.4 Leo Moses and Tony Woodbury working on Cup'ik, 2002 (photo: Mary Moses)

dead from neglect. In the Cup'ik version there are a number of affective suffixes, referring in turn to the poor dear grandmother (*anuuruluruluagguaq*), the poor dear young man (*cikmi'urlurlun'*) as he was blinded, the shabby old great hunter (*nukalpialleraam*) about to test the younger hunter's worthiness to marry his daughter, and the shabby old grandson (*tutgararululleraq*) getting up early at dawn. But hardly any of these made it through to the English rendition. Rather, we just get "the grandmother," "a great hunter" and "he went . . . when the day was about to come," except for a single description of "that poor young man" being blinded.

The overall effect produced on the narrative by removing this suffixal coloration is to weaken the emotional engagement with the characters, the sympathetic portrayal of characters dwarfed by the greater forces of fate. Leo Moses, of course, is still in full command of his native linguistic traditions, which he inhabits and savors when he chooses to speak his ancestral tongue, Cup'ik. But for younger people Cup'ik is becoming moribund, and language loss means cultural loss. These generations will not be able to appreciate the full richness of their forebears' stories once their emotional bandwidth has been narrowed as they are recast in an alien tongue: "[A]estheticized and emotionalized traditions of language use are dependent for their stability – if not their very definition – on particular

features of a traditional lexicogrammatical code and are therefore not transplanted (or readily transplantable) into a new language.”³⁰

The Great Semanticist Yellow Trevally Fish

Some days after the subincision,³¹ all the *warama* [second-degree initiates] taught the new *warama* the second initiation language, Demiin . . . They whistled as if whistling to a dog, and they laughed derisively as if to say, “Ah you think you know something. But like a dog you know nothing.”

(McKnight 1999)

So far we have been concentrating on the use of language for poetic or narrative purposes, but a more conscious forging of linguistic codes is also found in special *registers* – distinct ways of talking learned by adults for specific purposes. We can illustrate this with a ritual register called Damin (classically pronounced *Demiin*), which was taught to Lardil men on Mornington Island as part of their initiation as *warama*.³² Damin is said to have been created by an ancestor known as Kaltharr (Yellow Trevally Fish), and has a rich inventory of sounds, some echoing what “fish talk” would sound like.

The legendary Ken Hale, who was able to bring his brilliant language-learning skills to bear on transcribing Damin from its last fluent practitioners in the 1970s, noted that it bore all the hallmarks of a “brilliant invention.” One feature that points to this is the fact that all sounds with unusual airstream mechanisms occur in only one word each (except for those with clicks).³³ Moreover, historical reconstruction of archaic word forms since Hale’s work has shown that some of them clearly involve disguising normal words by substituting a similar but more exotic sound: the *m* of the proto-Tangkic word **miyi* for vegetable food is converted to a nasalized bilabial click in the Damin correspondent, *m!ii* – phonetically [ɸɔi:], which you can make by directly following a smooching smack of your lips with the sound *ee*. Likewise, the *k* of a proto-Tangkic word for “eye,” *kuwa*, is converted to an ejective in the Damin word *k’u*.

Because grammatical affixes are simply taken over from everyday Lardil, it is only the word roots that display these special phonemes, as can be illustrated by the following sentence equivalents from everyday Lardil (6a) and Damin (6b): Damin substitutes *n!aa* for *ngada*, *didi* for *ji-*, and *l*i* for *yak-*, but leaves the grammatical suffixes intact (other than slight differences in the form of the object-marking suffix).³⁴

- (6) a. *Ngada ji-thur yak-ur*
 ɳada ci̯tuɻ yakuɻ
 I eat-FUT fish-OBJ
 “I will eat fish.” (ordinary Lardil)
- b. *N!aa didi-thur l*i-ngkur*
 ɳ!aa titiɻuɻ ɬɻin̩kuɻ
 I eat-FUT fish-OBJ
 “I will eat fish.” (Damin)

However striking its phonetic exoticism, it is the semantic structure of Damin that represents a true tour-de-force in language analysis. As I mentioned in chapter 3, since the time of Leibniz philosophers and semanticists in the western intellectual tradition have been seeking an “alphabet of human thought,” which would allow all meanings to be decomposed into a small stock of elements. Damin comes close to achieving this goal – out of nowhere in terms of prior philosophical traditions, and without drawing on any tools of written logical notation. It maps the many thousand lexical items of everyday Lardil onto around 200 words by a combination of highly abstract semantics, extended chains stringing together meaning extensions,³⁵ paraphrase, and supplementation by hand signs.

In the above example, *n!aa* does not simply equal *ngada* (“I”) but can denote any group including the speaker. This corresponds to nine different pronouns in everyday Lardil, representing the three-dimensional matrix formed by *ngada* (“I”) plus the eight possible ways of saying “we.”³⁶ Thus ordinary Lardil *nyarri* (“we two, not you, in even-numbered generations”), *nyaan* (“we two, not you, in odd-numbered generations”), *ngakuli* (“we more than two, including you, in odd-numbered generations”), five other “we” pronouns, and *ngada* (“I”) all come out as *n!aa*. English, with “I” and “we,” sits somewhere between the terminological exuberance of Lardil and the abstractness of Damin.

To give another example, *didi* does not simply correspond to *jitha* (“eat”) but also includes all actions producing a change to the affected object, such as *barrki* (“chop”), *betha* (“bite”), and *kele* (“cut”). Another word, *diidi*, which sounds similar but has a long vowel, includes all actions of motion and caused motion, such as *waa* (“go”), *jatha* (“enter”), *murrwa* (“follow”), and *kirrkala* (“put”). Sometimes the motion is to be understood metaphorically, involving a change in possession (*wutha* “give,” *wungi* “steal”), or a transfer of information (*kangka* “speak”).

By these means Damin achieves a total semantic analysis of the entire vocabulary into a small number of elements, and Hale is not exaggerating when he refers to it as a “monument to the human intellect.” Elsewhere he has drawn attention to the fact that its association with rituals outlawed by the missionaries in power on Mornington Island meant that its transmission was interrupted well before the transmission of everyday Lardil: “The destruction of this intellectual treasure was carried out, for the most part, by people who were not aware of its existence, coming as they did from a culture in which wealth is physical and visible. Damin was not visible for them, and as far as they were concerned, the Lardil people had no wealth, apart from their land.”³⁷ Tucked away in the oral traditions of a people regarded as primitives by mainstream Australian society, this singular logical breakthrough had been completely invisible to the outside world – and was casually eliminated by missionary policy that had no inkling of what it was destroying.

Unfortunately my use of the words “total semantic analysis” in the preceding paragraph needs to be tempered by the observation that the last *Demiinkurlda* or “Damin-possessors” died before it could be comprehensively recorded and charted. The fragmentary recordings that we have from the 1960s and 1970s leave many questions unanswered about how ambiguities would be resolved, or whether some words allow different paraphrases using alternative criteria.

Consider the verb “eat.” Since it produces both a physical displacement and a physical change to its object, we might expect it to allow paraphrase with *didi* (“produce physical

change to") as well as *diidi* ("move"). My teacher Bob Dixon, working in the 1960s and 1970s with the Dyirbal people a few hundred kilometers to the east, recorded and analyzed Jalnguy, their "mother-in-law language." Although it was learned as part of polite adult etiquette rather than ritual observance, it is similar to Damin in its many-to-one semantic compression, although it does not drive its vocabulary compression so far. Dixon's patient work, which involved carefully quizzing different old speakers like George Watson and Chloe Grant, showed that for many words speakers disagreed on the best mother-in-law rendition. We can't tell whether there were cases like this in Damin, or what speakers would do with proper names like place names or personal names, whose semantics is not always analyzable but which in principle form an unbounded set.

An Oral Culture Always Stands One Generation Away from Extinction

The . . . culmination occurs when the ceremonial life of a traditional people is threatened by language erosion. That is, when the most deep- and far-reaching forms of expression the people possess . . . grow pale, lose significance and coherence, and begin to die.

(Jocks 1998:231)³⁸

Must a culture be lost when its ancestral language ceases to be spoken?³⁹ This question is of burning interest to speakers of small languages around the world as they try to preserve their fragile traditions, but there is no simple answer to it. People may well manage to maintain hunting practices, food preparation, distinctive costumes – or even ways of using language such as avoiding direct questioning or the use of personal names, which many indigenous peoples in southern Australia have carried over as they switched to speaking English.

What is certainly clear, though, is that among the many perceptive and moving insights tied up in that intangible flow we call language, those held most dear by the cultures themselves are the ones sculpted through and into their verbal art. Their conspicuous maintenance – whether through Welsh eisteddfods, Ku Waru chanted tales, Cup'ik storytelling, or Jurtbirrk song performances – acts as a point of attraction for younger community members drawn to the prestige and wisdom of their master storytellers, singers, and bards. As R. McKenna Brown puts it: "[L]iterature, both in spoken and written forms, is a key crossover point between the life of a language and the lives of its speakers. Literature gives a language prestige; and knowledge of its literature enriches a language's utility for its speakers. Both act to build the loyalty of the speakers to their own language."⁴⁰ Luise Hercus, one of the great veterans of linguistic fieldwork in Australia, recalls that at the end of her first day of recording from Wemba-Wemba speaker Stan Day in Echuca in 1962, he insisted on singing her a song he had learned from his grandfather:⁴¹ "To him and to other 'last speakers' language and song were inseparable, and a song was something very special. People wanted the songs and traditions to be recorded for the future: they somehow felt that this was the voice of their culture."⁴² The unsuspected creative masterpieces

we have considered in this chapter should make it clear why linguists should heed their valuation and make the recording of verbal art, in its full richness, one of their highest goals.

Further reading

On Welsh poetic traditions see Parry (1955). Good discussions of ethnopoetics, verbal art, and oral literature include Bauman (1989), Sherzer and Woodbury (1987), Fox (1988), Finnegan (1992), Hymes (1981), and Fabb (1997). Jakobson (1987a), although more oriented to poetics in written literatures, is a stimulating collection by someone who believed in the inescapable unity of all linguistic questions. Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (2000) is the best source on Parry and Lord's Montenegrin studies, and two works by Tedlock (1983, 1996) pair an initial study of the problems of representing oral performance with a sensitive translation of the *Popol Vuh* and a discussion of its history and cultural background. Rumsey (2001) was the first report of the *Tom Yaya Kange* chanted tales, with further refinements in Rumsey (2006). Sapir's classic study of Nootka "abnormal speech" is still fascinating reading and can be found in Mandelbaum (1949); the Cup'ik study is from Woodbury (1998). The best discussion of Dyirbal mother-in-law language is Dixon (1971).