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Productivity of word formation patterns in Iwaidja

The topic of this talk is the productivity of word formation patterns in the Australian Aboriginal language Iwaidja, spoken in Northwestern Arnhem Land. There is currently very limited work that addresses how Iwaidja might form new words (Pym & Larrimore 1979; Teo 2007). This talk surveys existing patterns and presents results of ﬁeld research targeting productive patterns in word formation. Available data suggests that tool kit of word formation was once much richer than today, including verbal composition/incorporation, reduplication and suﬃxal derivation.

Ongoing ﬁeld work suggests that at least deadjectival inchoative verbs are productive, even though it is not fully clear how relevant allomorphs are distributed.

1. -*waliwi* ‘bad’ -*waliwiɲmi* ‘become bad’
2. -*guɭɟag* ‘rich, important’ -*guɭɟakbi* ‘become rich, important’

Other suffixed morphology includes causative formations historically derived with the verb -*ma* ‘get’ (Teo 2007: 44), but it is yet unclear whether this formation is productive.

There is also some indication that Iwaidja nouns may be sourced from whole NPs that are zero derived to become nouns.

1. a. *Baniwaɾgbi*

3sg.sit-man

Place name

b. *Baɰaɭambiɟ*

3sg.head.snake  
 Place name (‘Snake’s Head’)

c. *a-ɖaja-n baɟu-ŋan*

1sg>3sg.pres-see-pres 3sg.die, hurt-ant

‘I see a dead body’

This is similar to what Evans (2003: 220–222) describes for Bininj Gun-Wok. However, while (8a) and (8b) are clearly nouns, this is not so evident for *baɟuŋan*, which could simply mean ‘3sg died’. A similar case is *wugan*, which is normally translated as ‘boss’. It transparently means ‘3sg is watching’, and it is in fact not a nominal form, as it can’t be used with determiners or possessives with the intended meaning ‘this’ or ‘my’:

1. a. \**ŋabi w-uga-n*  
    I 3sg.pres-watch-pres

intended meaning: ‘my boss’, as in e.g. *ŋabi gamu* ‘my mother’

b. *nuji aŋ-uga-n ŋaɖung*

you 2sg.pres-watch-pres 1sg.pron.obl

‘You are my boss’ (lit. ‘you watch me’)

c. *ŋabi ŋ-uga-n nuwuŋ*

I 1sg.pres-watch-pres 2sg.pron.obl

‘I am your boss’ (lit. ‘I watch you’)

Cases like (8c) and (9) are interesting mismatches between morphosyntax and lexical meaning, similar to idioms. Ongoing work is ascertaining the extent of the phenomenon, but it might be extensive, as e.g. so-called kinship verbs (Evans 2000) suggest, which are often translated as nouns.

This talk contributes to our understanding of word formation patterns in Iwaidja, with synchronic and diachronic implications including especially the question why and how the range of productive patterns has shrunk so much in Iwaidja, and what patterns are productive synchronically and why this might be.

References

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