

Classifier-coverb systems in Western and Southern Daly

In this paper we overview and provide demonstrations of a formal (morphological) and semantic comparison of the verbal classifier systems of Ngan'gityemerri (Reid 1990) and Marrithiyel (1989). While the two languages belong to different (immediate) families, with Ngan'gityemerri being a branch of the Southern Daly family (Green 2003), and Marrithiyel being a member of the Western Daly group (Green 1995 ms), they are generally held to be genetically related at some ancestral level as Australian (Dixon), non Pama Nyungan (Evans) or even perhaps wider Daly family (Tryon 1974) languages. In the future task of determining what, if any, deeper level nodes the Southern and Western Daly languages might belong to, comparative data on verbal classifiers - or their cognate systems in other Australian languages - may prove as crucial as it has to the current lower level analysis (Green 2003, 1995ms). In undertaking this comparison between Ngan'gityemerri and Marrithiyel, then, we look to make principled distinctions between the attribution of shared features to genetic and diffusional sources, and we seek to understand the degree to which morphologically complex systems such as verbal classifiers are amenable to contact-induced change under conditions of on-going social contact and more general linguistic diffusion, looking at how this may be manifest in respect of formal borrowing, structural convergence and semantics.