

# LANGUAGE

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in favor of 'pride' and against 'punishment' (221). Real people know that, in the real world, knowledge of 'right' and 'wrong' in language DOES make a difference, however simplistic those categorizations may seem to the linguist. Until we achieve the total eradication of racism and classism, any approach to language education that ignores this pragmatic reality is doomed to be dismissed as ideological wool gathering. Lanehart's credentials as a linguist are not at question, but in this case she is preaching to the choir, not the nonspecialist reader for whom the book is intended.

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- FANON, FRANTZ. 1963. *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.  
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**Nominal classification in Aboriginal Australia**. Ed. by MARK HARVEY and NICHOLAS REID. (Studies in language companion series 37.) Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997. Pp. x, 296. Three maps, language index, subject index.

Reviewed by GREVILLE G. CORBETT, *University of Surrey*

The languages to which this collection is devoted, primarily from northern Australia, have had relatively little discussion, yet they exhibit interesting features and prove vital for pushing forward the debate about the nature of nominal classification. Several papers are based on extensive fieldwork, and they reveal something of the rich and different cultures in which the languages belong. The authors make progress in three areas: first in the typology of systems of nominal classification, where they discuss the differences between classifier and gender systems, showing the distinction is not so clear-cut as sometimes imagined; second in diachrony, in the rise of gender systems and of agreement; and third in the function of these systems.

The 'Introduction' (1-15) by the editors sets the scene: 'Nominal classification systems are a prominent feature of many Aboriginal languages from northern Australia. However, to date, there are detailed materials on only a few languages' (1). They then give an overview of the papers in the volume.

MARK HARVEY, 'Nominal classification and gender in Aboriginal Australia' (17-62), gives valuable data on anomalous genders. A typical pattern in Australian languages is for nonhuman animates to pattern with male humans; but within the nonhuman animates there may be some that are anomalously feminine. Or within a set of nouns assigned to feminine gender, some may be masculine. Harvey claims that certain patterns of anomalous gender assignment recur across languages. The data are presented in a useful appendix.

FRANCESCA MERLAN, STEVEN POWELL ROBERTS, and ALAN RUMSBY, 'New Guinea "classificatory verbs" and Australian noun classification: A typological comparison' (63-103), contrast less familiar languages in an insightful way. In Ku Waru (Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea), classificatory verbs make a four-way distinction, and the semantics is presented carefully. Wardaman (Northern Territory, Australia) is rather different, in having a system of three noun classes (genders) distinguished by agreement on modifiers. In such a system, the classification of nouns is highly consistent, and so the relevant morphology can be used productively for 'reference management', that is, both to instantiate and to maintain reference (100).

NICHOLAS EVANS, 'Head classes and agreement classes in the Mayali dialect chain' (105-46), provides a great deal of relevant data from extensive fieldwork. Mayali divides its nouns into

five classes, according to whether they take one of four prefixes or have none. Agreement targets divide the nouns into four classes, according to agreement markers which match the four noun prefixes. But there are complications. By distinguishing head classes (cf. inflectional classes) from agreement classes (cf. genders), Evans shows the Mayali system more clearly than in previous accounts and also gives a picture consonant with more familiar systems. The system just described is in fact that of one dialect only; Evans shows how the other dialects differ in significant ways, adding further support to the distinction he draws. Having shown the potentially familiar part of the system, Evans presents data on 'superclassing', where two pairs of classes are collapsed into one.

Mark Harvey, 'Head and agreement classes: An areal perspective' (147-63), discusses the distinction examined by Evans with reference to other languages of the region and includes further discussion of superclassing.

The final three papers are on relatively closely related languages, all belonging to the southern and western subgroups of the Daly family. As with Evans's comparisons within Mayali, the comparisons across the family illuminate the individual analyses.

NICHOLAS REID, 'Class and classifier in Ngan'gityemerri' (165-228), analyzes a system with arguably fifteen genders, with semantic assignments such as male, female, canine, nonhuman animates (other than canines), striking instruments, and separate genders for two types of spear (distinguished by their size, the material from which the shaft is made, and the type of woomera used to propel them). Nine genders are distinguished by the bound agreement markers found on agreement targets, such as adjectives (1), while six have (optional) freeform generics/classifiers (2):

- (1) a-syensyerrgimi                      a = tyentyenmuy  
 ANIMATE-white.rock.wallaby ANIMATE-tame  
 'a tame white rock wallaby' (181. '=' is used for clitics and '-' for affixes)
- (2) (syiri) magulfu                      (syiri) marrgu  
 STRIKE cylindrical.fighting.stick STRIKE new  
 'a new cylindrical fighting stick' (177)

*Syiri* is the freeform generic for weapon-like objects which have a striking type of contact. In its first use in (2) it is analogous to a classifier. In its second use it is more like an agreement marker. At first sight we might think the language has two different systems, but this is not the case, since in some genders there is a generic available in addition to a marker on the noun and to a bound agreement marker. Moreover, while the use of the generic is optional, so too is agreement (168). Ngan'gityemerri provides a clear window on the rise of gender systems and of agreement systems. Reid charts the likely development from freeform generic to bound agreement marker, in a system in which the generics are still feeding the gender system (211-22); the special interest of the Daly languages in this respect was pointed out by Greenberg (1978). The interest of Ngan'gityemerri does not stop there since the gender markers can attach to various constituents, including clauses, giving the functional equivalent of a relative clause. This leads to a discussion of the function of the gender system, especially in the coining of new words.

IAN GREEN, 'Nominal classification in Marrithiyel' (229-53), describes a system comparable to that of Ngan'gityemerri and draws out interesting similarities and differences (as also with Murrinhpatha). The assignment to classes varies slightly but is relatively transparent, and membership is essentially fixed (230). Whether a noun is in a class which takes a free form generic or a bound one is irrelevant syntactically (244-5), and the generics occur as agreement markers. On this basis Green shows the importance of Marrithiyel for refining Dixon's (1982) class/classifier distinction.

MICHAEL WALSH, 'Noun classes, nominal classification and generics in Murrinhpatha' (255-92), discusses a related language whose classification system also seems to fall between a noun class system and a classifier system. Walsh therefore investigates carefully the degree to which the different classifying elements are bound or free. Again one can see interesting similarities and differences by comparison with the two related languages just described.

In conclusion, the editors deserve our thanks for bringing this research together, initially at a

workshop and then in this collection. A slightly firmer editorial hand might have improved the presentation: For instance, terms could have been better standardized for discussing comparable systems, as in the last three papers. Overall this is an important volume, rich in data and in ideas, relating to the typology, diachrony, and function of nominal classification systems. Anyone interested in nominal classification should read it.

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