INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

1. Overview

One of the fascinating aspects of studying languages is the window they provide on the way people categorise their world and their experiences. On the one hand, each language reflects a unique way of categorising. On the other hand, there are enough striking similarities between languages to enable one to establish general principles underlying human categorisation.

The basic system of categorisation resides in the vocabulary: the lexicon of each language carves up semantic space in different ways. Not only do meaning and use of ‘translation equivalents’ rarely completely coincide across languages, but one language may also use a simple expression where another one only has complex expressions available (cf. Boas 1963 [1911]: 20).

In most if not all languages, the vocabulary itself is subject to further categorisation: lexical items can be classified according to their syntactic and morphological properties, resulting in the familiar divisions into part of speech categories, as well as more fine-grained subclasses of these. For example, much recent linguistic research has been devoted to the syntactically relevant predicate classes in different languages. These classes are usually covert, in the sense that class membership is not marked explicitly, but can only be deduced from the behaviour of the item in question. It has been shown that this type of classification is to a large degree semantically based, and in this way also reflects human categorisation.\footnote{E.g. Breu (1985), Dixon (1991), Dowty (1979), Drossard (1987), Essegbey (1999), Lehmann (1991, 1992a, 1993), Levin (1993), Levin & Rappaport (1995), Sasse (1991), Tsunoda (1981b), Van Valin (1986), Vendler (1967).}

In addition, a number of languages also have overt systems of categorisation. Perhaps the best-known case is nominal classification: through the use of nominal classifiers in certain constructions, entities are ‘sorted’ into a finite number of categories. A lot of cross-linguistic research has been concerned with establishing the basis for this categorisation (see §5.1.1 for references).
A number of Australian Aboriginal languages, including Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru – two closely related varieties which are spoken in the Victoria River district in the north of the continent – provide an interesting window on categorisation within the domain of event expressions, in terms of lexical categorisation, morpho-syntactic categorisation, and overt categorisational systems. This is related to the particular structure of their lexicon. In these languages, inflecting verbs constitute a closed class; in Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru this class has less than 35 members. Verbs from this closed class will also be referred to as ‘generic verbs’; they may occur as verbal predicates on their own, or form phrasal complex predicates with members of an open class of predicative lexemes. These are distinct from both verbs and nominals and will be termed ‘coverbs’ here. Coverbs do not inflect and cannot form a predicate on their own, at least not in finite clauses, where they always have to combine with a generic verb carrying the verbal inflections.

By way of introduction, examples for both simple and complex predicates in Jaminjung are provided in (1-1). The simple predicate in (1-1a) consists of the inflecting verb -ma ‘HIT’. The two complex predicates in (1-1b) and (1-1c) consist of the same verb and the coverbs bag ‘break’ in (1-1b), and walig ‘(move) around’ in (1-1c). Coverbs and generic verb roots are in boldface.

(1-1a) gani-**ma**-m jurruny-ni
     3sg:3sg-HIT-PRS lower.arm-ERG/INSTR

   ‘he hits him with the hand’ (DP, KNX054)

b) miri **bag** burra-**ma**-nyi gurrubardu-ni
   leg  break 3pl:3sg-HIT-IMPF boomerang-ERG/INSTR

   ‘they used to break its legs with a boomerang’ (kangaroo) (IP, F01042)

c) **walig** gani-**ma**-m **barrig**
   round  3sg:3sg-HIT-PRS paddock

   ‘he walks around the fence (in a full circle)’ (MJ, D05068)

This structure of the lexicon has consequences for all three types of categorisation. On the level of the vocabulary, the consequence is that most predicative expressions (to be precise, all predicates minus the thirty-odd inflecting verbs that can function as simple predicates, if one disregards nominal predicates) are complex rather than simple, in contrast to their translation ‘equivalents’ in many other languages. The questions arising here are: What are the patterns of lexicalisation in a verbal lexicon that is structured in this way? More precisely, what semantic relationships exist between the components of the complex predicates? Are they comparable to the relationships found in the complex predicates of other languages?
On the level of covert categorisation (in terms of categories and subcategories established in terms of their morpho-syntactic behaviour), languages like Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru are interesting because they have two formally distinct parts of speech whose members largely correspond to ‘verbs’ in many other languages. This leads to the question of whether there is a semantic basis for the inclusion of lexical items in the small, ‘privileged’ class of generic verbs, and whether any subclassification of the open class of coverbs into predicate classes is possible on formal grounds. Since coverbs do not inflect and have hardly any derivational possibilities, there seems to be little basis for a subclassification based on morphology at first sight. And since they usually do not occur as the main predicate of a clause on their own, there also seems to be little basis for a subclassification based on syntactic possibilities. Still, covert subcategories of coverbs can be distinguished by the sets of verbs that they combine with to form complex predicates. Here the question arises whether the subclasses established in this way correspond in any way to predicate classes established – by different means – for other languages.

Most importantly, the generic verbs in Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru participate in a system of overt categorisation. This is because one of these closed-class verbs is obligatory in every finite clause, either on its own as a simple verb, or as part of a complex verb. In other words, a Jaminjung or Ngaliwurru speaker has to select one of a small number of verbs in every finite clause, and thereby ‘sorts’ all event expressions into a relatively small number of categories. In order to make a claim that this selection indeed reflects a system of categorisation, it has to be shown, of course, that the choice of a verb has a semantic basis, rather than being random or lexically determined by a given coverb. If this can be demonstrated, one can ask what constitutes the conceptual basis of event categorisation in this language. An answer to this question can be provided by accounting for the meaning of each of the closed-class verbs, and their conditions of use.

In this study, all the questions raised so far will be addressed, although the most detailed discussion will be devoted to the questions concerning the third type of categorisation, that of overt event classification. The main claim put forward in this study is that the majority of complex predicates – including seemingly bewildering cases like (1-1c) above – are semantically compositional. In other words, the closed-class verbs are meaningful even when they occur as part of complex verbs, and the selection of a particular verb is based on its meaning.

In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to factor out the semantic contribution of the generic verb, the coverb, and the complex predicate construction itself to the complex expression. Moreover, one has to assess the potential contribution of the argument expressions that the complex predicate occurs with, as well as that of the further linguistic and nonlinguistic context, and that of general principles of interpretation, to the interpretation of the expression as a whole.
The thesis is structured as follows. The remaining sections of this chapter provide an introduction to the situation of the language and its speakers (§1.2), to the kinds of data that form the basis of this study (§1.3), and to the theoretical framework on which this investigation is based (§1.4).

Chapter 2 provides a description of the main grammatical features of Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru, which forms the background for the remaining chapters. It also serves to establish coverbs – the uninflecting predicative lexemes – as a lexical category distinct from verbs and nominals.

In Chapter 3, the syntactic behaviour of coverbs and verbs (both as simple predicates and as parts of complex predicates) is examined. Canonical complex verbs – of the type illustrated in (1-1b) and (1-1c) above – are established as a construction type distinct from other types of coverb-verb combinations.

The argument structure of simple and complex verbs is described in Chapter 4. The adoption of a Construction Grammar framework, which distinguishes between semantic and morpho-syntactic arguments, provides the foundation for a compositional treatment of complex verbs. It enables us to state that both coverbs and verbs contribute semantic participants to the complex predicates, but that these correspond to a single set of arguments on the morpho-syntactic level. It is therefore a prerequisite for the unificational approach to the semantics of complex verbs developed in Ch. 6. Since differences in argument structure can be accounted for partly by differences in constructions, rather than differences in lexical representation, this approach also enables us to pursue a monosemic analysis of coverbs and verbs.

Chapter 5 constitutes the core of this study. Here, the meaning and use of each of the closed-class verbs, both as a simple verb and as part of complex verbs, is examined, in order to provide evidence for the claim that the verbs participate in a system of overt event categorisation. Particular care is given to a distinction between the semantic and the pragmatic basis for the selection of verbs.

In Chapter 6, subclasses of coverbs are established, based on the sets of verbs that coverbs of each class combine with. This method arrives at both formally and semantically circumscribed classes, thus further supporting the claim that the combination of coverbs with verbs is not random, but follows patterns which have a semantic basis. The semantic contribution of both verbs and coverbs to the complex can now be assessed in more detail. It will be explored whether to what extent the unification of verbs and coverbs in a complex verb construction is based on semantic compatibility.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the preceding chapters, and places the results in a cross-linguistic perspective. It will be argued that Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru, and other Northern Australian languages in a contiguous geographic area, indeed exhibit unique patterns of lexicalisation and complex predicate formation, which
allow for the classificatory use of a closed class of verbs. On the other hand, it can also be shown that these patterns reflect tendencies that are rather common cross-linguistically.

1.2 Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru and their speakers

1.2.1 Language names and genetic affiliation

Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru are two closely related linguistic varieties spoken in the Victoria River Area of Northern Australia, in the general area indicated on Map 1 at the beginning of this chapter. Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru are – somewhat more distantly – related to one other variety, Nungali, now almost extinct. Together, these varieties constitute a language family that has been referred to as ‘Jaminjungan’/‘Djamindjungan’ or ‘Yirram’\(^2\) in the literature (Hoddinott & Kofod 1976a, b, c; Chadwick 1997; Green 1995). A fourth variety, Jilngali or Yilngali, is mentioned in the literature (Capell 1940: 418), but could not be identified. It is possible that this was a name used by a neighbouring speech community to refer to Jaminjung (cf. also Cleverly 1968: 4; Bolt et al. 1971a: 1).

For the subgroup consisting of Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru, Chadwick (1984, 1997) suggests the term ‘Baj’, supposedly corresponding to the word for ‘speech’ in both varieties. However, \textit{baaj} is only the Ngaliwurru term for ‘speech, language’; the corresponding Jaminjung word is \textit{liiny}. For the sake of simplicity, I will use ‘Jaminjung’ as a cover term for both varieties and provide a more precise identification only where necessary. The relationships within the Jaminjungan family are represented in Fig. 1-1.

Fig. 1-1. The Jaminjungan language family

\[ 
\text{Jaminjungan} \\

\text{‘Jaminjung’} \quad \text{Nungali} \\

\text{Jaminjung} \quad \text{Ngaliwurru} \\
\]

\(^2\) \textit{Yirram} is the form of the dual clitic in all the languages of this group.
The Jaminjungan languages constitute one of the non-Pama-Nyungan or ‘Northern’ language families of Australia (the boundary between the non-Pama-Nyungan and the Pama-Nyungan families is indicated by a thick black line in Map 1). Although probably all languages on the Australian mainland are ultimately related, no closer genetic relationships have been established with any certainty between most of the non-Pama-Nyungan families, or between these and the Pama-Nyungan family, which occupies most of the Australian continent (cf. e.g. Dixon 1980, Blake 1988).

For Jaminjungan, Chadwick (1984, 1997) suggests a distant genetic relationship to another non-Pama-Nyungan family, the Barkly languages, which include Jingulu/Djingili (Chadwick 1975, Pensalfini 1996) and Wambaya (Nordlinger 1998b). The larger family consisting of Jaminjungan and Barkly languages is also referred to as the Mindi (Mirndi) family (e.g. by Green 1995), based on the form of the dual inclusive pronoun mindi which is one of the features distinguishing the languages in this group from all other surrounding languages. The Jaminjungan and Barkly languages today are not geographically contiguous, but separated by members of the Ngumbin subgroup of Pama-Nyungan. They are also structurally very divergent (in particular, the Barkly languages do not have complex verb constructions of the type investigated here), and have only a very small number of cognate forms. Several cognates, moreover, can be identified as borrowings from the Ngumbin languages, rather than shared retentions. The existence of some cognate verb forms (see §2.4.2.1) does support a genetic relationship. However, the verification of the suggested genetic relationship, and the reconstruction of the prehistory of these language groups, are a matter of ongoing research and will not concern us here.

Within the Jaminjungan family, Nungali (Bolt et al. 1971b) differs from both Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru in its lexicon and in its verbal and nominal morphology; it is probably best regarded as a separate language. The most substantial difference between Nungali and the other two varieties is that only Nungali has noun class prefixes. This is also reflected in the language name Nungali, which has as its first syllable a Class prefix nu-, added to the base stem ngali. The meaning of the stem is not known, but it also seems to appear in the name Ngaliwurru, where it is followed by the proprietive or ‘having’ suffix -burru ~ -wurru (Nungaliwurru instead of Nungali is also sometimes heard, and correspondingly Ngali instead of Ngaliwurru). The etymology of the language name ‘Jaminjung’ is also unclear.

For this study, only data from Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru have been taken into account. These two varieties are phonologically, morphologically and syntactically almost identical (see Ch. 2 for details), and can therefore be considered dialects of a single language from a linguistic point of view. The percentage of shared vocabulary is high but it is difficult to come up with an actual figure, since speakers living in geographically distant communities will
show a higher divergence in vocabulary. This seems to be due partly to influences from different neighbouring languages, such as Ngarinyman (for Ngaliwurru speakers) and Miriwoong or Gajirrabeng and Murrinh-Patha (for Jaminjung speakers). On the other hand, speakers of Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru who today live in geographical proximity to one another (as in the communities around Timber Creek), often use lexical items of both dialects interchangeably. Because of these difficulties, the dialect is not generally indicated with the examples throughout this study (however, it is indicated for each of the texts in the Appendix). Rather, the speaker is identified in each case by his or her initials, and a list with each speaker’s language group affiliation, place(s) of residence, and degree of multilingualism is provided in §1.3.3 below.

1.2.2 Geographical location

Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru and Nungali people traditionally occupied a contiguous area along both sides of the lower Victoria River. This major tidal river and its tributaries constitute the most prominent geographical feature of this area. The rivers cut through steep-rising plateaus, forming mostly narrow valleys and gorges, and only partly wider plains (around the West Baines River). Not surprisingly, the direction of the flow of water plays an important role in the Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru system of spatial orientation (see §2.2.2.4).

Climatically, the Victoria River District is part of the subtropical monsoon area in the northernmost part of Australia. There is heavy rainfall and flooding in summer (December to March), followed by an essentially dry and cooler season in winter (April to July), and a ‘buildup’ of increasing heat (August to November) until the next rainfall.

Both the areas traditionally occupied by the Jaminjungan and some surrounding language groups, and the Aboriginal communities where Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers can be found today, are indicated in Map 2 (this map represents the area that is framed by a box in Map 1). Due to depopulation and population shifts, there are many uncertainties as to the areas associated with the Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru, and Nungali language varieties. Roughly, Jaminjung country is located between the Fitzmaurice River in the north and the Victoria River in the south, although a small stretch of country south of the Victoria River and west of the East Baines River is also identified as Jaminjung by some people. Jaminjung is bordered in the north by Murrinh-Kura (closely related to Murrinh-Patha) and Wagiman country, in the east by Wardaman, in the south by Nungali and Ngarinyman, and in the west by Gajirrabeng (Gajerrawoong).

As far as I know, no Jaminjung people now live in their traditional country. Until recently, when a large part of it (formerly Bradshaw station) was acquired by the
army, Jaminjung country was still legally owned by cattle stations. Jaminjung
speakers today live in Mirima Camp (‘Reserve’) in Kununurra, in Timber Creek,
and in several communities and smaller outstations near these towns, including
Ningbingi, Marralam, Ngamanbidji (Kildurk), Bulla, and Gilwi, as well as in
Wadeye (Port Keats), and even in Katherine, but only constitute a minority in
each of these places.

Ngaliwurru people traditionally occupied the Stokes Range/Jasper Gorge area
south of the Victoria River. In the north, Ngaliwurru country is bordered by
Nungali country, in the east and south by Karangpurru country, and by Bilinarra
and Ngarinyman country in the south and west.

Interestingly, as far as we know, traditional Nungali country geographically
separates Ngaliwurru and Jaminjung country, despite the closer linguistic
relationship between the latter two, as opposed to Nungali. Nungali country
extends east of Ngaliwurru country along both sides of the Victoria River,
bordering on Wardaman country at Langgayi (Victoria River Crossing). Since
only a few people identify themselves as Nungali today, and the Nungali
language is no longer spoken, Ngaliwurru and Nungali tend to be presented as
‘one group’ in the statements of traditional owners (cf. Bauman et al. 1984: 30f.,
quoted in Riddett 1990: 48f.).

The majority of Nungali and Ngaliwurru people have been able to remain in their
traditional country, in the communities Murranginy (One Mile), Myatt (Five
Mile), Gilwi (Eleven Mile), and on Fitzroy Station. Other Ngaliwurru speakers
live in communities in Ngarinyman or Bilinarra country such as Barrac Barrac,
Yarralin, and Lingara, or in the township of Katherine. As the result of three land
claims in 1984, 1986, and 1992, the land rights for some small areas of
Ngaliwurru/Nungali country were returned to the traditional owners. These
involve the areas around the township of Timber Creek, around Kidman
Springs/Jasper Gorge, and the Fitzroy Cattle Station. Most of the area, though,
remains under the control of cattle stations, or has been converted into a National
Park.

1.2.3 Social organisation

Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru and Nungali people led the nomadic life of hunter-
gatherers, until European settlement led to major disruptions of this lifestyle (see
§1.2.4). The language groups would be subdivided into smaller clans, with
specific rights over smaller areas of country (‘estates’). Traditional owners of the
country – in terms of clan membership – are still recognised and identified today,
and the attachment to land continues to be of great importance in all aspects of
culture.
In their daily life, people were not restricted to movements in the area they owned, but could move over considerable distances for the purpose of hunting and gathering. They also engaged in trade, and maintained ceremonial and intermarital relationships with members of neighbouring language groups, such as the Ngarinyman, Bilinarra, Miriwoong, Gajirrabeng (Gajirrawoong), Murrinh-Patha, and Wardaman. These relationships continue to be of importance to the present day. The close contact between neighbouring language groups resulted in a high degree of multilingualism, which is reflected in a high percentage of loanwords, and a high degree of structural convergence, across genetic boundaries (see §7.1).

Education, e.g. in the knowledge of the environment, hunting techniques, song and dance, and mythology would have begun very early in life. There was a clear division of labour according to gender. Especially for men, there were also periods of formal instruction (described to me as *blackbala university* by one middle-aged Ngarinyman man), which accompanied rituals for several stages of initiation. Traditional knowledge is still passed on, and ceremonies are held at least occasionally, although, like other aspects of the traditional lifestyle, ceremonial life has been severely disrupted. Hunting, fishing and foraging also still play an important part in people’s lives although they do not usually rely on this for subsistence.

Interpersonal rights as well as obligations were, and continue to be, determined to a large extent by kinship ties. Kinship terms designate not only a person in a direct relation of descent or marriage, but always include the so-called ‘classificatory’ kin. Effectively, in this way a kinship relation can be determined to every person in the social universe. Avoidance behaviour has to be observed between in-laws (especially a man and his mother-in-law), as well as brother and sister, and children of opposite-sex siblings (cross-cousins).

The kinship system is complemented by a subsection system, whereby each individual is assigned to one of eight subsections (‘skin’ in Aboriginal English) by descent, each further subdivided into a male and female section (see e.g. McConvell 1985a, 1997). The subsection system in principle determines the choice of marriage partner, although the restrictions are loosened with genetic distance, and are no longer strictly adhered to today. The subsection name of a person continues to be the most frequent term of address.

### 1.2.4 Contact history

Like Aboriginal people elsewhere in the region, Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru and Nungali people have suffered, and continue to suffer, from the effects of European settlement and the establishment of cattle stations in their traditional country.
The contact history began in 1834, with Stokes’s exploration of the Victoria River, and a subsequent expedition (1855/56) led by Gregory. The establishment of cattle stations began soon afterwards, in the 1880s.

There can be no doubt that the early contact history in the Victoria River area was extremely violent. Aboriginal oral history speaks of resistance to the settlement, and numerous massacres and killings as ‘punitive measures’ for spearing of cattle and sometimes of people. An account of an early massacre in Ngaliwurru country which can be dated roughly to the 1910s is reproduced as Text IV in the Appendix (further accounts can be found e.g. in Rose 1991). The spread of previously unknown diseases also took their toll among the Aboriginal people of the region.

At first, the survivors were forced to leave their traditional country if it was in the grazing area of the cattle stations, and seek refuge in less accessible areas. Sooner or later most of the Aboriginal inhabitants would be forced to join the work force of the cattle stations, as essentially unpaid labour. Almost all older Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru people who are alive today worked on cattle stations earlier in their lives, as stockmen, cooks, builders, or domestic workers. Some people also worked for the police as ‘trackers’, a particularly ambiguous role. The Aboriginal people I have met tend to speak of this work in a matter-of-fact way, and also with considerable pride of their achievements and skills in tracking, horsemanship, handling cattle, and other aspects of station life. However, their accounts also leave no doubt that their work was extremely hard, and that they continued to suffer from mistreatment, injustice, and condescending treatment on the part of the European station personnel, although conditions would vary considerably with the individuals involved.

The government policy of taking children of mixed descent away from their families, in order to have them raised in missions, institutions or adoptive families, has recently received renewed attention (under the term ‘The Stolen Generation’) due to several prominent legal cases. Almost every Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru family was affected by this practice, which was enforced up until the early 1950s. Some of the fluent Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers today are people of mixed descent who managed to escape the fate of being taken away.

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3 In many areas of Australia, the other alternative was to enter into a mission. As far as I know, no missions were established in Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru country, although apparently some Jaminjung people moved to Port Keats Mission (now Wadeye) in Murrinh-Patha country.

4 For descriptions, including first-hand accounts, of the lives of Aboriginal men and women on cattle stations in the area see e.g. Berndt & Berndt (1987), Rose (1991), Riddett (1990), and Shaw (1992). For accounts of the role of police trackers, see e.g. Bohemia & McGregor (1995) and Balme & Toussaint (1999).
The ‘employment’ of Aboriginal men and women on cattle stations decreased considerably in the seventies, after strikes of Aboriginal workers on some stations and increased awareness on the part of the ‘outside world’ had led to the introduction of equal wages. Forced labour now gave way to unemployment, and land and power still remain largely in the hand of non-Aboriginal people.

Today, most Aboriginal people of the area do not live on stations, but in state housing, either on the fringes of the townships of Kununurra, Timber Creek, and Katherine, or in independent communities on what is usually only a tiny stretch of Aboriginal-owned land. More recently, several outstations have been established, i.e. small communities in a family’s traditional country, usually in remote areas (see §1.2.2 above). There is an ongoing struggle to regain at least some of the country by means of land claims, and to protect sacred sites.

Many people today depend on the welfare system, although some have work on stations, as health workers, in administration, or producing traditional artefacts or paintings, usually for the tourist market. In some communities, a government program of community development (CDEP) has been established, which provides part-time employment for work in and around communities. People of retirement age receive a small pension. Alcoholism is a serious problem in all age groups.

Most communities have their own primary schools, but few young people successfully complete secondary, let alone tertiary, education. The schools are mainly run by non-Aboriginal people, and the failure to account for cultural differences can be seen as one of the reasons for these results.

1.2.5 Present-day speech community

The effects of European settlement summarised in §1.2.4, as elsewhere on the continent, are also reflected in the situation of the Aboriginal languages in the area. Today there are no clearly identifiable Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speech communities, and both dialects are in severe danger of disappearing. For Nungali, the number of speakers was reported to be extremely low as early as 1967 (Bolt et al. 1971c: 1), and today there are only a few old people with very limited knowledge of Nungali, mainly in terms of vocabulary.

Many actual fluent speakers of the languages do not identify themselves as Jaminjung or Ngaliwurru by descent, but have acquired the language at some stage (usually early on) in life. All older speakers are multilingual, sometimes in four or more languages, which reflects the traditional relationships between the Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru and neighbouring language groups mentioned in §1.2.3.
Today, the language of much of the daily interaction, even among older people, is Kriol, an English-based creole language (see e.g. Sandefur 1979, 1991, Harris 1986, 1991, Harris & Sandefur 1985). Even when the traditional languages are spoken, code-switching and borrowing are very common (see e.g. McConvell 1985b; cf. also §3.5). For children, Kriol is the first language, and Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru are no longer acquired. In interaction with non-Aboriginal people, Kriol (or an acrolectal variant of Kriol), or Aboriginal English are used, depending on the age of the speaker and his or her exposure to English.

The actual number of remaining Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers is very difficult to estimate, both because middle-aged people are fluent in the traditional languages to varying degrees, and because I have not been able to visit every community where speakers are reported to be living. My estimate lies somewhere between 50 to 150 speakers (for Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru taken together), scattered over a large area (see §1.2.2 above).

At present no language program for Jaminjung or Ngaliwurru exists at any of the community schools or via the radio, although some younger Jaminjung people have enrolled in Batchelor College (a tertiary Aboriginal College) in courses involving vernacular literacy and interpreting. None of the older, fluent speakers is literate either in English or in Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru.

The regional Language Centres in Kununurra (Mirima Dawang Woorlabgerring) and Katherine (Diwurruwurru-Jaru Aboriginal Corporation) serve as production centres for language materials and as archives for research materials, and also run language programs, but no language program so far has targeted Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru directly. Many older people are distressed by the loss of the traditional languages and the associated knowledge, and are keen to have these documented. Still, as far as I could observe, local initiatives to actively maintain the languages are very limited. This is no doubt due to a preoccupation with other battles – land claims and the protection of sacred sites, as well as simply overcoming the difficulties of daily life – and perhaps also to a general feeling of resignation.

1.3 Fieldwork and data

1.3.1 Previous research on the language

Linguistic documentation and description of Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru is comparatively scarce. The present study is based largely on my own fieldwork, but has profited considerably from the – largely unpublished – work of others.
In 1938, Arthur Capell collected Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru and Nungali data, including texts, which remain unpublished (but see Capell 1939, 1940). It appears that around 1930, Gerhard Laves also did some work on Jaminjung, but I have no information on the extent to which Jaminjung is documented in his fieldnotes.

John Cleverly undertook about eight months of fieldwork on Jaminjung in 1966 and 1967, and wrote an (unpublished) grammatical sketch (Cleverly 1968). Janet Bolt worked on Ngaliwurru and Nungali for four months in 1967. Her field notes were compiled into grammars of Ngaliwurru and Nungali by William Hoddinott and Frances Kofod (Bolt et al. 1971a, b), on the model of Cleverly’s Jaminjung grammar. All three grammars present a fairly detailed coverage of the morphology and include a word list of around 500 items and some texts, but the syntactic description is very sketchy, and there is only a very brief account of complex verb formation.

In 1971, Michael Walsh recorded extensive vocabulary and some grammatical information. Frances Kofod made some further recordings of Jaminjung, and Patrick McConvell has worked with some Ngaliwurru speakers. Caroline Jones recorded a number of texts in Ngaliwurru, and also lexicographical data, in 1994 and 1995. Mark Harvey undertook intensive research for several months in 1996 on Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru as well as Nungali. Mark Harvey, Frances Kofod, Caroline Jones, Patrick McConvell and Michael Walsh have very generously shared their material with me, and some of it was included in my database. Where I quote their data, the source is always acknowledged.

The only published descriptions of selected aspects of Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru and Nungali linguistic structure are brief papers by Hoddinott and Kofod (1976a, b, c) and Schultze-Berndt (1998).

1.3.2 Fieldwork setting

My own fieldwork was undertaken during six trips to the Northern Territory between April 1993 and August 1999, amounting to 26 months in total. Fieldwork was basically conducted with funding from outside. In comparison with fieldwork under the control of an Aboriginal community (cf. Wilkins 1992), this has certain ‘advantages’: the freedom to determine one’s research goal and time schedule. It also has its drawbacks: the insecurity as to one’s role with

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5 For works taking primarily a diachronic perspective, see the references in §1.2.1.
respect to the community, and the constant need, on both sides, to negotiate one’s expectations.6

During the first field trip in 1993, I lived in Bulla Camp for seven months, because the community offered a house that was not otherwise used during that period. On subsequent field trips, I stayed partly with linguist friends in Kununurra and Katherine, and partly in a Caravan Park in Timber Creek. Thus, I did not permanently live with Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers or their families. However, I attempted to spend as much time as possible, under these circumstances, with speakers and other people with whom I had developed a personal relationship.

This type of ‘participant observation’ involved overnight visits to people living in outstations, overnight bush trips, shorter fishing and hunting trips, or – more rarely – visits to specific significant sites. It also involved joining people in their communities or in public places during everyday activities – meals, card games, gossip, waiting for a bus, looking after children, and so on. It also often meant offering transport, for example between a community and the shop or clinic. For some months, I also became involved in tutoring younger Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru and Ngarinyinman students who were enrolled in a tertiary degree in vernacular literacy, and I devised some computer materials with spoken Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru vocabulary for use by children. During the last few field trips, video recordings of bush trips or at sites of mythological or historical significance became increasingly popular with the speakers and their families, and provided a good opportunity not only for checking textual materials when showing them to various interested parties, but also for returning some language materials to the community.

The more formal recording sessions (which rarely extended to more than one or at most two hours per day) took place in the communities of the speakers, or else in a shady spot in the vicinity. For these sessions, speakers were paid the rate set by the local Language Centres. Time spent recording or doing intensive elicitation was limited by several factors, among them age and bad health of the speakers, and other commitments, such as childcare or family problems.

Since Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers are dispersed through a number of small communities in a large area (see §1.2.2, and Map 2), fieldwork involved an extensive amount of travelling (easily 2000 km per month).

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6 For a fuller personal account of some of the difficulties involved, see Schultze-Berndt (1995).
1.3.3 Contributors

Over the years, I was able to work with approximately 30 Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers, and of these more regularly with a dozen speakers. Most of the contributors are women, and all the people who I worked with regularly were older than 45 years. The latter all contributed a range of text types and materials (see §1.3.4).

All contributors are listed in Table 1-1 below, with their name\(^7\) and subsection name, and their initials as used in the examples. In addition, information on language group affiliation by descent, (further) languages spoken, and close kin relationship (in European terms) to other speakers is included, to the best of my knowledge.\(^8\) The main place(s) of residence during 1993-97 is given in brackets. Those speakers who were regular contributors are indicated with an asterisk following the initials. People deceased by 1999 are indicated by a † following the name.

If not otherwise noted, speakers are/were fluent in the languages they are affiliated to, with the exception of the people of Nungali descent, none of whom are fluent speakers of Nungali. Probably several speakers for whom it is not indicated also speak Ngarinyman, Miriwoong or Murrinh-Patha, depending on their place of residence and kinship ties. All speakers are in addition fluent in Kriol. For the relationship between the dialects Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru, see §1.2.1.

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\(^7\) Only the names used in official dealings with non-Aboriginal people are given here. Although these sometimes correspond to the traditional, ‘Aboriginal’ name, personal names are generally of a more private nature in Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru culture.

\(^8\) The information comes from discussions with the contributors, supplemented by valuable information from Mark Harvey (p.c.) and Frances Kofod (p.c.). It is likely to contain errors and should be cross-checked before quoting e.g. for the purpose of establishing land rights.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Subsection</th>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Language group affiliation, relationships, main place of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biddy Simon (Namirra)</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Jaminjung/Murrinh-Patha (Marralam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolly Bardbarriya (Nangarla)</td>
<td>DB*</td>
<td>Gajirrabeng but with Jaminjung as main language, also fluent in Ngarinyman (Bulla)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris Bilminga† (Nambijin)</td>
<td>DBil</td>
<td>Jaminjung/Gajirrabeng/Miriwoong, spoke Jaminjung (Kununurra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy Bitting (Nanagu)</td>
<td>DBit*</td>
<td>Murrinh-Patha/Jaminjung/Gajirrabeng; married to JLe (Kununurra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darby Diyawatulwan (Julama)</td>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Nungali, fluent in Ngaliwurru and Wardaman (and other languages) (Timber Creek)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Jones (Nangari)</td>
<td>DJ</td>
<td>Ngaliwurru/Nungali, semi-fluent in Ngaliwurru; daughter of JJ (Myatt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan McDonald (Jabarda)</td>
<td>DM*</td>
<td>Nungali/Ngaliwurru, married to DMc (Gilwi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinah McDonald (Nangari)</td>
<td>DMc*</td>
<td>Jaminjung; married to DM (Gilwi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris Pannikin (Nangarla)</td>
<td>DP*</td>
<td>Murrinh-Patha/Jaminjung/Gajirrabeng; sister of IP (Kununurra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris Roberts (Nanagu)</td>
<td>DR*</td>
<td>Ngaliwurru, also speaks Ngarinyman; married to LR (Barrac Barrac / Timber Creek)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen Huddleston (Nangarla)</td>
<td>EH</td>
<td>Jaminjung (Kununurra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen Roberts (Nangarla)</td>
<td>ER*</td>
<td>Ngarinyman; also fluent in Jaminjung (Bulla / Palumpa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa Pretlove (Nangarla)</td>
<td>IP*</td>
<td>Murrinh-Patha/Jaminjung/Gajirrabeng; sister of IP (Kununurra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine Jones (Nawurla)</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Nungali/Ngaliwurru (Myatt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Lewis (Julama)</td>
<td>JLe</td>
<td>Nungali/Ngaliwurru; married to DBit (Kununurra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Marchant (Namirra)</td>
<td>JM*</td>
<td>Ngaliwurru, also knows some Nungali; daughter of MW (Timber Creek, Fitzroy Station)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie Moore (Nalyarri)</td>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Ngarinyman, knows some Jaminjung; daughter of ER (Bulla/Katherine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Dalmarrang† (Namirra)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Nungali/Ngaliwurru, spoke Ngaliwurru and Ngarinyman, sister of DM (Bulla / Lingara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Roberts (Jalyirri)</td>
<td>LR</td>
<td>Ngarinyman, also speaks Ngaliwurru; son of ER, married to DR (Timber Creek)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel Daly (Namij)</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Ngaliwurru; daughter of LD (Lingara)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3.4 Kinds of data, and methods of data collection

As can already be gathered from the remarks in the previous sections, fieldwork methods and the procedure of data collection were quite eclectic. The primary goal was to record as much natural speech as possible from as many speakers as I could.

The lexical database compiled so far consists of approximately 2000 single word entries (of which approximately 520 are coverb entries), and in addition approximately 1700 complex verb entries. The textual database on which this study is based comprises more than 16,200 (intonation) units (see below), which have been transcribed, glossed, translated and annotated. This includes around 1500 units from the various sources listed in §1.3.1, and some 2000 units which were not tape-recorded, but overheard or dictated.

Where the data were tape-recorded and transcribed, the units correspond to intonation units, that is, units of speech delimited by a significant change in pitch contour, usually coinciding with a noticeable pause. These are considered to be the information units into which the speaker decided to divide the text (cf. Chafe 1987, Halliday 1985: 274). Intonation units often, but not necessarily correspond to clauses (see also §2.6). Units from sources other than tape-recorded texts usually correspond to clauses. Intonation units are usually written in separate
lines, but for reasons of space, two shorter units are sometimes included in a single line.

The divisions made here are fairly coarse and based on auditory impression only. There is a usually clear distinction between medial (slightly rising pitch) and final (falling pitch) intonation unit boundaries (cf. also Cleverly 1968: 34ff. and Bolt et al. 1971a: 33ff). These are distinguished in the notation by the symbols “,” and “\”, respectively. An instrumental study of prosodic features, and a more detailed rendition of prosodic characteristics, e.g. a distinction between primary and secondary units, would clearly have been desirable, but was beyond the scope of this study.

The transcription was undertaken by myself. For a subset of recordings, such as longer texts, speakers were consulted for clarification. A substantial amount of data were videotaped, which often provided valuable information about the context.

The database covers a variety of text types, including short spontaneous directives (cf. Himmelmann 1998: 179f.), conversations, narrative and procedural texts, and elicited utterances. These types cannot always be clearly delimited from one another, since elicitation often faded into a short narrative, or a conversation, especially when more than one speaker was present during a recording session (which was often the case). For these reasons, the text type is usually not indicated for the examples reproduced here. Note also that narratives were often not monologues, but rather co-constructed by two or more speakers. The topic of the narratives were mainly accounts of joint activities, especially hunting trips, or recent and historical events and life histories. Traditional myths are very scarce, which may partly be due to the fact that most of the Jaminjung people live outside their traditional country and have not visited significant sites for a long time (this is not true to quite the same extent for Ngaliwurru people; see §1.2.5 above).

A substantial amount of data was not obtained by elicitation in the narrow sense, but comes from staged communicative events (in the terminology of Himmelmann 1998: 185f.). These include narratives that were prompted (e.g. when I asked a speaker to give an account of a trip just undertaken), or elicited comments on a situation set up verbally or non-verbally, e.g. by enacting. A number of nonverbal stimuli also elicited interesting data (sometimes in other areas than the stimuli were originally designed for); these therefore figure quite prominently in this study. Mostly, these stimuli were designed by members of the Cognitive Anthropology Research Group (now Language and Cognition Group).

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9 As an example of a speech event somewhat intermediate between elicitation and conversation, consider the online comment on parachute jumping reproduced as Text I in the Appendix.
at the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen; these are listed in Table 1-2. In addition, I also obtained several ‘Frog Story’ narratives, based on the picture book ‘Frog, Where Are You’ by Mercer Mayer, and following the procedure outlined in Berman & Slobin (1994) and Slobin (1993).

Table 1-2. MPI Elicitation Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and purpose of stimulus</th>
<th>Type of stimulus</th>
<th>Stimulus designed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men &amp; Tree – Description of spatial arrangement, photo-to-photo matching</td>
<td>photos</td>
<td>Eve Danziger and Eric Pederson (cf. Danziger &amp; Hill 1993: 11-13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Animals – Description of spatial arrangement, photo-to-object matching</td>
<td>photos</td>
<td>Eric Pederson (cf. Danziger &amp; Hill 1993: 15-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COME &amp; GO Questionnaire</td>
<td>Abstract scenes as basis for own enactment etc.</td>
<td>David Wilkins (Wilkins 1993b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topological Relations Picture book</td>
<td>Line drawings</td>
<td>Melissa Bowerman and Eric Pederson (Bowerman 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motion elicitation ‘Shoebox’</td>
<td>toy manipulation</td>
<td>David Wilkins (Wilkins 1995a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter/Exit Animation</td>
<td>video (animation)</td>
<td>Sotaro Kita (Kita 1995, Wilkins et al. 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of State (vs. impact without change of state)</td>
<td>video (acting)</td>
<td>James Essegbey, Roberto Zavala and Eva Schultze-Berndt (Essegbey 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Sand Drawings’</td>
<td>Line drawings</td>
<td>David Wilkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMPEST (Temporal relation elicitation stimulus)</td>
<td>video (acting)</td>
<td>Jürgen Bohnemeyer (Bohnemeyer 1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In verbal elicitation I relied as little as possible on direct translation of isolated sentences, but rather on scenarios that were constructed verbally, either of an imaginary nature or with some relation to the non-linguistic context. The language used on my part in this kind (and in fact in most kinds) of interaction was English, or what I considered my best shot at Kriol.

Most importantly, the textual database only contains what speakers have actually said, and no data obtained through acceptability judgments, since problems with this procedure are well known. This does not mean that I did not make any attempts to obtain acceptability judgments, in particular in the area of investigation under focus here. Thus, I would often construct an utterance
containing a complex verb (i.e. combinations of a verb and a coverb; see Chs. 3 to 6) that I had not previously encountered. A frequent reaction was not a metalinguistic statement, but an utterance where the suggested verb was replaced with one of the ‘correct’ verbs (much more rarely, the coverb was replaced). If more than one speaker showed this reaction, and effects from contextual inappropriateness could be excluded, I considered this a ‘negative acceptability judgment’. If a speaker took up the suggested combination and constructed an actual utterance around it, and if this could also be replicated with another speaker, this was considered a reliable ‘positive acceptability judgment’. Utterances elicited in this way were also often included in the database.

A further procedure that proved fruitful in eliciting and checking coverb-verb combinations was prompting with just a coverb. Most speakers would respond with a full utterance containing one of the appropriate verbs, and often a list of possible combinations could be elicited in this way. (The reverse procedure – prompting with just a verb – was not very fruitful, that is, speakers would not readily list possible combinations).

Of course translations by speakers, and the clarification of the meaning of particular lexical items or utterances were also often sought. Translations were often offered spontaneously by one of the speakers present, or even embedded in the omnipresent spontaneous code-switching which was already commented on in §1.2.5. Such translations were noted verbatim since their significance often became apparent to me only later, with my growing appreciation of Kriol. Where they shed light on a particular point of relevance for this study, they have been included, flagged as ‘Original Translation’, with the example in question.10

All the materials included here document everyday speech. I have no evidence that an avoidance language is in use by Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru speakers (although it is quite possible that one existed which has by now fallen out of use). Neither could I obtain any information on an ancillary sign language that would go beyond some common conventional signs.11

It should be kept in mind throughout that under the circumstances just described, the depth of coverage that can be attempted in a study like this is very different from that for a language with a healthy speech community and a long history of research. I am only too aware of the many gaps and inadequacies in the

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10 For reasons of convenience, I have often resorted to using English orthography in transcribing Kriol utterances, especially for acrolectal Kriol. Only part of the Kriol utterances are represented in the phonemic orthography generally used in Kriol literacy programs (cf. e.g. Sandefur 1979).

11 For information on avoidance languages in Australia, see e.g. Dixon (1971), Haviland (1979), and the contributions in Heath et al. (1982). For sign languages in other parts of Australia, see e.g. Kendon (1988) and Wilkins (1997a).
description. I only hope that the analyses offered here at least do not badly misrepresent the genius of the Jaminjung and Ngaliwurru language.

1.4 Theoretical framework

This study is not based on any single framework, but draws on various approaches. It has a ‘functionalist’ bias, that is, it is based throughout on the assumption that language is used to convey meaning. In other words, speakers usually have a reason for choosing a certain linguistic expressions rather than another. Consequently, in this view, the goal of linguistic description is not so much to define all ‘well-formed’ utterances that a speaker of a given language may produce, but rather to account for the choices speakers make in producing an utterance.

The following sections provide an outline of the constructional approach to grammar taken here (§1.4.1), the principles adopted for the description of lexical semantics (§1.4.2), and a clarification of the term ‘event’ as used throughout this study (§1.4.3). Only the most important principles and terms are introduced here; specific notational conventions that will only be of relevance in certain parts of this study are introduced once they are needed.

1.4.1 The construction-based approach to grammar

In this study, I follow the traditional approach of describing language structure in terms of constructions of varying complexity. These are regarded as constituting complex symbolic units (i.e. complex signs) in their own right. This view is thus opposed to the ‘autonomous syntax’ approach, according to which grammar is based on rules and constraints which operate independently of either semantics, pragmatics, or general cognition. The construction-based approach to grammar can be traced to the Structuralists (e.g. Bloomfield 1970 [1933]: 162f., Hockett 1958, Frei 1962; cf. also Matthews 1981 Ch. 1). It is also one of the fundamental tenets of the schools of Cognitive Grammar (e.g. Langacker 1987, 1990, Lakoff 1987), Construction Grammar (e.g. Fillmore 1988, Fillmore et al. 1988, Kay & Fillmore 1999, Zwicky 1987, Goldberg 1995, Lambrecht 1994, Michaelis & Lambrecht 1996, Zhang 1998), and the Wierzbicka school (e.g. Wierzbicka 1988, Wilkins 1989, Ameka 1991), and is explicitly or implicitly adopted in many works with a typological-functional orientation. While these approaches differ in detail of representation and in some of their assumptions, they all share the fundamental assumption that grammatical constructions are meaningful.
1.4.1.1 Defining constructions

Grammatical constructions in the sense employed here are variously characterised as ‘schematic symbolic units’ (Langacker 1987: 58), ‘schematic templates’ (Langacker 1990), or ‘construction-based templates’ (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997). Langacker describes the construction-based view of grammar as follows:

... I conceive the grammar of a language as merely providing the speaker with an inventory of symbolic resources, among them schematic templates representing established patterns in the assembly of complex symbolic structures. Speakers employ these symbolic units as standards of comparison in assessing the conventionality of novel expressions and usages, whether of their own creation or supplied by other speakers. (Langacker 1990: 16)

Constructions as ‘patterns’ or ‘templates’ have to be distinguished from actually occurring linguistic expressions. Expressions are ‘based on’, ‘sanctioned by’, or ‘instantiate’ constructions. That is, constructions are complex signs that exist independently of the lexical forms that instantiate them. The difference can be characterised following Hockett (1958), if ‘habit’ is replaced with ‘construction’:

A language is a complex system of habits (p. 137) (...) An act of speech, or utterance, is not a habit, but a historical event, though it partly conforms to, reflects, and is controlled by the habits. Acts of speech, like other historical events, are directly observable. Habits are not directly observable; they must be inferred from observed events... (p. 141)

Constructions can be defined as patterns which are non-compositional, in the sense that the meaning of a complex expression that instantiates this pattern could not be arrived at solely by relying on the meanings of its parts, or the meanings of other constructions. In other words, if the meaning of a complex expression can only be fully stated with reference to the properties of the pattern itself, this pattern has to be recognised as a construction in its own right – which, in a sense, is idiomatic (Fillmore et al. 1988: 501; Goldberg 1995: 13f., cf. also Bloomfield 1970 [1933]: 162f., Frei 1962). For example, in a language like German, where declarative and interrogative sentences are only distinguished by word order and by intonation, the illocutionary force cannot be derived from the meaning of the lexemes or grammemes in the sentence, but only by recognising the type of construction that this sentence instantiates. ‘Interrogative’ vs.

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12 In early structuralist works, yet other terms can be found, e.g. ‘tagmeme’ (Bloomfield 1970 [1933]: 166ff.) and ‘catène’ (Frei 1962).

13 For a particularly clear statement of the difference, see also Frei (1962: 133ff.)
‘declarative’ can be used to characterise the signficatum side of the construction, its constructional meaning.

Maintaining the view that constructions are meaningful is one thing, being able to state this meaning, quite another. In typological-functionalist linguistic works, it is common to describe constructions in terms of their prototypical functions. For example, the function of a transitive construction could be characterised as ‘Proto-agent acting on proto-patient’ (cf. Dowty 1991). The problem with the prototype account of constructional meaning is, of course, that it does not capture the language-specific properties of a construction. The only way to adequately describe the meaning of language-specific constructions is to supplement a characterisation of its function with a description and extensive exemplification of the range of uses to which it is put (cf. Halliday 1985: xxvi). This basically descriptive approach is the one followed here.

Constructions in the sense just outlined can describe patterns traditionally treated under the heading ‘morphology’ (e.g. a pronominal prefix slot followed by a slot for a verb root), as well as patterns traditionally termed ‘syntactic’ (e.g. a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase). This approach therefore easily accommodates expressions that are not easily classified as either ‘complex words’ or ‘syntactic expressions’, including the complex predicates that form the focus of this investigation. A further justification for this conflation is that syntactic and morphological constructions are diachronically related by processes of grammaticalisation (see e.g. Lehmann 1985b, 1995; Bybee 1985). This approach to morphology will be of some importance in the treatment of pronominal affixes in Ch. 4.

Constructions, moreover, also include templates that are already partly lexically filled, if this lexical filler constitutes a necessary part of the larger pattern. These could be constructions that are usually treated as idioms, e.g. ‘X let alone Y’, discussed by Fillmore et al. (1988). Constructions that contain grammatical formatives (e.g. in Jaminung NP-gu V, where -gu is a dative case marker) also fall under this definition (cf. also Himmelmann 1997: Ch. 2).

Therefore, one consequence of the Construction Grammar perspective is that ‘grammar’ is part of an extended lexicon which contains constructions in addition to simple signs. This view is defended, for example, by Goldberg (1995: 4). To avoid misunderstandings, I will use ‘lexicon’ in the more traditional sense,14 with reference only to signs whose signifier has a full phonological specification. This will be kept distinct in terminology from the ‘grammar’ (or ‘morpho-syntax’), defined as the full set of constructions, i.e. those symbolic units which are at least partly schematic (uninstantiated).

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14 See §1.4.1.3 below for a discussion of the relationship between lexicon and grammar.
Constructions in this sense can be identified and described in terms of the (classes of) lexical fillers (e.g. ‘determiner nominal’ for a noun phrase construction, ‘be dynamic verb-ing’ for the English progressive construction), or in terms of other constructions that they are made up of (e.g. NP VP), their arrangement, and their constructional meaning. Most linguistic expressions are instantiations of several overlapping constructions. These often correspond to the familiar phrase structure constituents; for example, a clausal construction can contain various types of noun phrase constructions, among other elements. However, it is important to recognise that constructions are not limited to the subtrees admitted by phrase structure rules (see e.g. Fillmore et al. 1988: 501, Langacker 1990: 28). This makes a Construction Grammar approach ideally suited to dealing with a language like Jaminjung with essentially free word order.

The integration of lexical fillers into certain constructions is enabled or ‘licensed’ by the compatibility of the meaning of a lexical item and the meaning of the construction (e.g. Goldberg 1995: 43ff.). Construction grammar is thus essentially a unification-based approach. Constructions can be related in two ways (and even in both ways at once): first, they may show formal similarities; examples include constructions related by grammaticalisation, e.g. the constructions instantiated by *I am going to London* vs. *I am going to retire*. Second, constructions may be paradigmatically related by virtue of being able to take the same fillers as another construction, and therefore contrasting with it in meaning (e.g. voice alternations such as active vs. passive, or declarative vs. interrogative sentences).

1.4.1.2 The construction grammar approach to argument structure

Of particular importance in this study will be argument structure constructions (Goldberg 1995). In most other approaches to argument structure (e.g. Valence Grammar, Dependency Grammar, Lexical Functional Grammar, Government and Binding), and also in some versions of Construction Grammar (cf. Kay & Fillmore 1999: 11), argument structure is described in terms of the inherent grammatical relationality or valency of lexical items. In other words, relational lexical items are conceived of as possessing grammatical slots which need to be filled by other items that appear in the construction, and at the same time determine the nature of those items. In the construction-based approach followed here, on the other hand, argument structure constructions are thought of as existing independently of lexical items.

In both approaches, the grammatical behaviour of lexical items is regarded as motivated by their meaning, while it is recognised that it is never completely predictable on the basis of meaning. In the ‘syntactic valency’ approach, grammatical relationality is said to be motivated by semantic relationality (e.g. Lehmann 1985a, 1992b). In the construction-based approach, semantic
relationality can be described independently of syntactic argument structure. Semantic arguments will be distinguished from constructional arguments by using the term ‘participant’ for the former, following the terminology used in some typological-functionalist frameworks (cf. the contributions in Seiler & Premper 1991), and also by Goldberg (1995). The term ‘argument’ will be restricted to constructional argument slots.

**Participants** are inherent in the lexical semantics of a relational predicative lexeme (e.g. a verb), and can be given labels that reflect verb-specific roles (e.g. ‘giver’), or roles common to a class of verbs (e.g. ‘recipient’). Thus, no universal set of participant roles (thematic roles) is assumed here. **Arguments**, in the usage adopted here, are slots in a construction and can be described both in terms of their formal manifestation (e.g. ‘subject’, ‘first pronominal prefix’, ‘locative-marked noun phrase’), and in terms of the constructional meaning associated with these slots (e.g. ‘Actor’, ‘Location’). Argument role labels will be distinguished from participant role labels by the use of a capital initial letter.

Participants can be encoded as arguments in an argument structure construction according to the principle of unification. This requires that participant roles and argument roles must be construed as semantically compatible (cf. Goldberg 1995). For example, in English, the ‘giver’ participant of the verb *give* can be encoded as a subject argument, since the subject in an active clause represents the most actor-like argument, and this, for *give*, corresponds to the ‘giver’.

**Arguments** as defined here comprise both ‘complements’ and ‘adjuncts’. It has long been recognised that the distinction between complements and adjuncts is a problematic one. Following Tesnière (1959), complements have often been notionally defined as those arguments which are inherent in the semantics of a given predicate, i.e. they correspond to semantic participants of the predicate, and are hence governed by the predicate (Matthews 1981: 124). Adjuncts, on the other hand, are defined as modifiers of a predicate, external to its semantics. Formal criteria that are adduced for argument status include obligatoriness or, as a weaker criterion, ‘latency’ (Matthews 1981: 125f.): a complement, even if not obligatorily present, is ‘understood’. Finally, representation by an unmarked noun phrase or a noun phrase marked by ‘syntactic case’ as opposed to a preposition or a ‘semantic case’ is also taken as evidence for complement status (see also Helbig 1992: 72ff.). The problem of distinguishing complements and adjuncts on the basis of these criteria arises because they often receive the same formal marking. The markers involved (e.g. case markers or adpositions) can often be given a meaning (the Jakobsonian ‘Gesamtbedeutung’, Jakobson 1971 [1936]) which remains constant across ‘complement’ and ‘adjunct’ functions.

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Although complements can often be distinguished from adjuncts by syntactic tests (such as accessibility to relativisation), such tests cannot be easily found in all languages (see §4.1.1).

For these reasons, I will use the terms core and peripheral arguments, as defined by Andrews 1985, rather than the terms ‘complements’ and ‘adjuncts’. Core arguments have to be identified by language-specific criteria (e.g. by their status as syntactic pivots, the fact that they are formally unmarked, or marked with certain cases). These will usually correspond to ‘complements’. Peripheral arguments (e.g. those marked with an oblique case like the dative) may correspond to ‘complements’ or ‘adjuncts’. In a constructional account, the difference can be described as follows: peripheral arguments may either encode a participant which is inherent in the semantic valency of a verb, or they may be arguments that are contributed solely by a construction, and thus fall outside the valency of the verb. However, core arguments will usually allow one to at least establish the basic valency of a predicate. It is therefore useful to distinguish between central\textsuperscript{16} and marginal participants. Central participants are expressed as (language-specific) core arguments across all constructions where a given predicate occurs. This distinction captures, to some extent, what has been referred to as the syntactic valency of lexical items. For example, the difference in argument structure between English rob and steal can be described in that the ‘victim’ is a central participant of rob but marginal for steal, and vice versa for the ‘thing stolen’, and that it is the central participant which has to be expressed as a core argument, here a direct object.

Thus, one could argue that the ‘syntactic valency’ approach and the construction-based approach merely describe two sides of the same coin: the conventional association of certain lexical items with certain constructions. Through recognising the independent nature of argument structure constructions (or valency frames), however, it is possible to avoid the type of regular polysemy that is necessary in a strictly ‘lexicalist’ approach (cf. e.g. Rappaport et al. 1993). That is, it is not necessary to postulate a different verb sense corresponding to a different argument structure (for a detailed discussion see Goldberg 1995: 9ff).

Finally, a strictly lexicalist approach becomes difficult to maintain when the grammatical behaviour of a complex expression is jointly determined by the constituents of this expression. This is the case for the complex predicates in Jaminjung. An alternative analysis can be implemented in any framework that allows for unification. It is based on the concept of ‘argument fusion’ or ‘argument sharing’: the relational properties of two (or more) lexemes join forces, as it were, to determine the relationality of a complex predicate. In a

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Drossard (1991), inter alia; alternative terms are ‘most involved’ (Lehmann 1991) or ‘profiled’ participants (Goldberg 1995).
construction-based framework, this can be represented by mapping two or more participants directly onto a single constructional argument role. This approach will be explored throughout Ch. 4.

Throughout this study, the term ‘valency’ will be reserve for semantic valency; I will speak of monovalent, bivalent and trivalent coverbs and verbs in the sense that they have one, two or three central participants. The terms ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ will be reserved for formal properties of verb stems: Verbs in Jaminjung take one of two paradigms of pronominal prefixes, an intransitive and a transitive one (see §2.4.1.2). ‘Syntactic transitivity’, i.e. the number of core arguments in a clause, will be described by referring to the presence of one, two or three core arguments (as defined in §4.1), or the possibility of one or more core arguments with a given predicate.

1.4.1.3 The relationship between grammar and lexicon

In most mainstream linguistic frameworks, the lexicon and the grammar are kept strictly apart. In this view, the grammar describes all expressions that can be derived by general rules, while the lexicon is the repository of everything that is idiomatic – first and foremost, the morphemes, but also all non-compositional complex expressions. The inclusion of compositional expressions in the lexicon is regarded as redundant.

In the view adopted here, the lexicon comprises all expressions that are conventionalised in a language. This is true even when these expressions are semantically transparent, and fully sanctioned by constructions that form part of the grammatical knowledge of any speaker of this language. In this view, there is no contradiction in saying that an expression is remembered as a fixed, conventionalised expression (‘stored in the lexicon’), while at the same time the patterns (or rules, if one prefers) on which the expression is built are available for productive, creative use (‘stored in the grammar’). Following e.g. Pawley & Syder (1983), Pawley (1986), Langacker (1987: 29ff., 41f.), and Grace (1987: 86f.), this can be argued to be a more realistic view of the linguistic knowledge of a speaker, even though the lexicon in this case has to be regarded as much larger than in the traditional view.

This point has been emphasised here because it is crucial for the description of complex verbs proposed in this study. Complex verbs (including the particle verbs of English and other European languages) have proved a notorious problem for theoretical frameworks which posit a strict division between a lexicon as a ‘list of irregularities’ and syntax as ‘rule-governed combinations’; see e.g. the discussions in Simpson (1991: 115ff.), Mohanan (1994: 234ff.), Goldberg (1996), Ackerman & LeSourd (1997), and Hampe (1997).
I will argue that, in Jaminjung, the majority of complex verbs are semantically compositional, and instantiate a single type of construction. Differences in reading will be derived from the semantic nature of the elements that are combined, and by pragmatic rules. Given this analysis, according to the traditional view these complex verbs should not be listed in the lexicon. However, there is no doubt that all (or most) of the complex verbs in the data examined here are highly conventionalised expressions, or collocations, and as such have to be part of the lexicon, both in the sense of ‘mental storage’ and in the lexicographer’s sense.

A further argument for this approach is that conventionalisation, and therefore also compositionality, is clearly a matter of degree. This can be captured to some extent with the distinction between encoding idioms and decoding idioms, proposed by Makkai (1972). A decoding idiom (such as pass out in English) cannot be interpreted unless one has learned its meaning. An encoding idiom, on the other hand, is easily interpreted on the basis of the meaning of its components. However, insofar as it cannot be predicted that they are part of the conventional repertoire, these expressions still constitute idioms that one has to learn in order to be a competent speaker of a language (this corresponds to the colloquial meaning of ‘idiomatic’). For example, the Dutch word hoeveelheid can easily be interpreted by an English speaker who knows the meanings of hoe ‘how’, veel ‘many’, and -heid ‘-hood’; still, hardly any English speaker who was looking for a translation of English amount would spontaneously produce this word if she had not previously learned it.

In this sense, a large percentage of complex expressions in a given language are encoding idioms, since they have to be licensed by convention, and are therefore lexicalised, at least under the definition of the lexicon assumed here. Collocations are a type of encoding idiom. Consequently, I will avoid the term ‘lexicalised’ in the reading of ‘idiomatic, non-compositional’. The term ‘idiomatic’ will be used instead, and should be read in the sense of ‘decoding idiom’. A refinement of the claim that Jaminjung complex verbs are semantically compositional would therefore state that they may be encoding idioms, but not decoding idioms. It is in this sense that the term ‘compositionality’ should be understood throughout this study.

1.4.2 The representation of meaning

This section gives an outline of the approach taken in this study to the semantic description of Jaminjung complex predicates and their constituents – in particular the semantically generic closed-class verbs.
1.4.2.1 The nature of lexical meaning

One of the assumptions made here with respect to the nature of lexical meaning is that semantic representations are rich and holistic, or, as some authors have put it, are of an encyclopaedic nature (cf. Haiman 1980b, Cruse 1986: 19, 1988, Taylor 1989, 1996). It is important to note that this does not amount to the claim that everything that is part of the encyclopaedic knowledge associated with a given word by a speaker is part of the lexical semantics of that word.\(^{17}\) On the contrary, the distinction between lexical meaning and pragmatic interpretation will be of great importance throughout this study. However, I maintain that the difference is one of degree, rather than type, in other words, semantic knowledge could be characterised as a subset of encyclopaedic knowledge (otherwise it would be difficult to account for the lexicalisation of implicatures; cf. e.g. König & Traugott 1988). Only meaning components that are conventionally shared by the members of a speech community will count as lexically encoded.

Thus, as already indicated in §1.1, the lexicon reflects a categorisation of experience. In other words, lexical items, at least in part, encode socio-culturally construed attributes of denotata. The terms semantic features and semantic components (used interchangeably throughout this study) should be understood in this sense. Although I will follow a decompositional approach in describing the semantics of Jaminjung verbs and coverbs, through the identification of components common to all denotata of utterances in which they occur, there is no need to postulate that semantic components are universal, or correspond to primitive, unanalysable features. This approach is therefore also compatible with the conviction that semantic features are, as it were, secondary, and categorisation is enabled primarily through the recognition of holistic, gestalt-like properties of denotata (e.g. Taylor 1989: 71).

This leads to the question of how semantic components or ‘features’ should be represented in a linguistic description. If semantic features are taken to be language-specific, there also is no universally applicable metalanguage. In this study, I have avoided the highly formalised metalanguage employed in many decompositional semantic approaches (e.g. Dowty 1979, Jackendoff 1990). This is not only because I did not want to be constrained from the start, in the exploration of the meaning of Jaminjung predicates, by the meta-language chosen, but also because there is a more fundamental problem with the application of this metalanguage to a language which itself, in its complex predicates, manifests a system of overt decomposition. In particular, one might expect the closed-class verbs of this language to correspond rather closely to the decompositional semanticists’ primitives of analysis such as ‘CAUSE’,

\(^{17}\) Cf. Taylor (1989: 83): “To say that the dictionary is encyclopaedic is not equivalent to saying that the dictionary is an encyclopaedia.”
‘BECOME’, or ‘DO’. As will be shown throughout Ch. 5, the meanings of
generic verbs in Jaminjung do not correspond very well to these notions.

The metalanguage employed here to explicate the meaning of lexical items is
therefore simply semi-standardised English. This does not always lead to elegant
explications, but is sufficient to characterise recurrent semantic components in
Jaminjung predicates, identify the contrasts between predicates, and capture the
relations between polysemous senses. In Ch. 5, the semantic description of
generic verbs is also sometimes complemented by a graphic representation. Both
graphic representation and explication by an English paraphrase should be
understood as tools to capture semantic invariants for the benefit of readers of
English, not as a psychologically real representation of the meanings of these
items for speakers of Jaminjung.

The phrasing ‘socio-culturally construed attributes of denotata’ employed above
also points to a difference between the approach taken here and truth-conditional
semantics. Semantic invariants, corresponding to those construed attributes that
all possible denotata of a given expression have in common, can be determined
without reference to truth-values; rather, they reflect a construal of the world on
the part of the speaker (cf. e.g. Lyons 1977: 209ff.).

1.4.2.2 Monosemy vs. Polysemy

Monosemy, that is, isomorphism between form and meaning,\(^{18}\) is adopted here
as a heuristic guideline for linguistic analysis (see e.g. Haiman 1980c, 1985;
Kirsner 1985, Taylor 1990), but not as an absolute principle. This will be of
particular importance for the semantic analysis of the generic verbs of Jaminjung,
undertaken in Ch. 5. The method resulting from adopting a monosemic bias can
be stated as follows:

Assume that any meaning that is not present in all contexts of a word is not
part of the word’s inherent meaning (Ruhl 1989: 234)

Monosemy can often be maintained by distinguishing carefully between the
meaning – the actual, lexical semantic invariants – and the contextual
interpretation of a linguistic expression. (In addition to these two terms, the
term ‘reading’ will be used, in a neutral, non-specific way, i.e. it can read either
as ‘meaning’ or as ‘interpretation’.) The distinction can be maintained, first, by
separating the meaning contributed by the various lexical items to the
interpretation of a complex expression from the meaning contributed by the
construction itself.

\(^{18}\) The possibility of homonymy is left out of consideration here, since it is assumed that
homonymy can usually be identified on the basis of formal and comparative evidence (cf.
Second, the distinction between meaning and interpretation involves a distinction between semantics and pragmatics, i.e. those parts of an interpretation that can be attributed to the meaning of either the construction or its fillers, and those that are merely inferred on the basis of pragmatic principles to be discussed in §1.4.2.3 below. In this context, those semantic components of a lexical item that remain invariant throughout all contexts will also be referred to as entailments.

The monosemic bias notwithstanding, there are many cases where polysemy, i.e. the existence of several senses, has to be recognised. Polysemy is recognised where the number and kinds of entailments of a lexical item are increased (semantic narrowing) or reduced (semantic bleaching) in specific uses of the item. Most metaphorical and metonymic uses of lexical items are also regarded as reflecting polysemy. This approach is not uncontroversial. The alternative possibility is to assume a mechanism of contextual modulation (Cruse 1986: 52) or ‘coercion’ (Pustejovsky 1993; see also e.g. Ross 1981, Ruhl 1989). This applies especially where a certain reading only arises in specific contexts. For example, the Jaminjung verb -ijga ‘GO’, which as a simple verb always has a locomotion reading, can have a metaphorical reading of ‘change of state’ if, and only if, it occurs in a complex construction with a coverb which itself encodes a type of state change (see §5.3.2.2). Here it seems tempting not to assign a separate sense of ‘change of state’ to the verb, but to allow for a derivation of this interpretation from the context. However, this extreme monosemist approach will not be followed here. This is because it makes it difficult to capture differences in meaning between semantically related items of different languages, which are due to different patterns of metaphorical or metonymic extensions (unless it is possible to formulate language-specific inferencing rules with general application). For example, a verb like see may ‘naturally’ extend to cognition (as in I see what you mean) in English and other European languages but not, generally speaking, in Australian languages (Evans & Wilkins 1998), and this extension should therefore be recognised as a polysemous sense of the English verb. And in Wagiman, a language that is not related, but geographically close to Jaminjung, the motion verb corresponding to -ijga ‘GO’ does not take on a change of state reading.

For polysemous lexical items, several criteria can, in principle, be adduced in order to distinguish the basic (default, least restricted) sense from extended senses (cf. Cruse 1986: 72; Taylor 1989: 116ff.). Among these criteria are differences in frequency, historical priority, order of acquisition, default interpretation by speakers, interpretation with respect to a ‘basic’ domain, or occurrence in the least restricted environments. Last criterion is the one most easily applied in the case of Jaminjung (the criteria of historical priority and order of acquisition cannot be applied at all). In particular, if a generic verb has one sense both as a simple verb and as part of certain complex verbs, but a
second sense only as part of certain other complex verbs, the second sense will be considered to be the extended one, and the first the basic one.

In line with the monosemic bias, my practice will be to use the same gloss for the same form throughout (except obviously in the case of homonymy). This holds for both lexical and grammatical morphemes and should be kept in mind in particular for the generic verbs (where the gloss often merely approximates the meaning of a verb). In other words, in glossing, the identification of a lexeme or grammeme has priority over a transparent relationship between glosses and free translation.

1.4.2.3 The contribution of pragmatics to interpretation

In distinguishing between the meaning and the interpretation of an expression, I follow a neo-Gricean approach. This complements the adoption of monosemy as a heuristic, since many specific interpretations can be analysed as coming about through pragmatic inferences, not semantic entailments (cf. Levinson 1983: 132). Inferences are of course guided by context (the particularised conversational implicatures), but to some extent are also guided by general principles (the generalised conversational implicatures).

The pragmatic maxims originally proposed by Grice (1967, reproduced in Grice 1989) have been reduced to fewer, and more general, principles by most of his followers. Two principles will be of relevance for the description of the Jaminjung verb system. Following Atlas & Levinson (1981) and Levinson (e.g. 1983, 1995, in press), these are termed Principle of Quantity (Q principle), and Principle of Informativeness (I principle).

The Principle of Quantity is essentially based on Grice’s First Maxim of Quantity (Grice 1967 [1989]: 26), “Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)”. Inferences arise out of mutual awareness of speaker and hearer of the principle, and of their respective needs (cf. Levinson 1995: 191). Thus, if the speaker uses an expression x, and there exists an informationally stronger expression y of roughly equal length, the hearer can, by the Q-Principle, infer that the speaker was not in the position to use y, since if she was in the position, she would have violated the Q principle by using the weaker expression. (For our purposes, ‘expression x is (informationally) stronger than expression y’ can be read as ‘the extension of expression x is included in the extension of expression y’). For example, if someone tells me *I just heated the soup*, I can safely assume that the soup is quite edible and did not get burnt, since if the latter was the case I would surely have been told. There is nothing in the semantics of *heat* that precludes the interpretation ‘heat and thereby burn’, since one could cancel the inference by saying *I just heated the soup, and in fact I burnt it*. The Q principle, thus, can also be summarised as “What is not said is not the case”. It will be employed, in
Chs. 5 and 6, to account for restrictions in the use of verbs with a general semantics. The Q principle allows as to predict that a more specific verb is (usually) employed rather than the more general verb, even where the meaning of the latter is also consistent with the event that is expressed.

It is important that the exploitation of the Q principle relies on metalinguistic knowledge, that is, on the knowledge about the existence of alternative expressions of roughly equal length (or formal markedness) in the language (cf. also McCawley 1978). This type of metalinguistic knowledge is also recognised when reference is made to ‘preemption’ or ‘blocking’ (cf. Matthews 1991: 76) of non-existent (but possible, i.e. compositional) forms another form. To use an example given above, the word *howmanyhood* in English, although compositional, is preempted by the existence of the word *amount*. The Q principle therefore corresponds to a specific type of preemption, of an informationally weaker by an informationally stronger form.

The **Principle of Informativeness** incorporates Grice’s Second Maxim of Quantity, “Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.” This principle allows a hearer to arrive, by inference, at a stronger statement than what is semantically contained in what the speaker has said. A simple example is *Jonathan is drinking again*; this will normally be read as ‘Jonathan has resumed drinking alcoholic beverages’, since a statement to the effect that Jonathan is consuming liquid of some sort hardly counts as an informative statement under normal circumstances. Again, the inference can be cancelled, and would not arise, for example, if the hearer knew that Jonathan had been in a coma. The I principle can also be paraphrased as “Read as much into an utterance as is consistent with what you know about the world” (Levinson 1983: 146f.).

From this brief characterisation, it will have become clear that the two principles have contradictory effects: the Q principle licenses the inference that a stronger statement could not be made. The I principle, in contrast, licenses the inference to a stronger statement (cf. Atlas & Levinson 1981, Levinson 1983: 146f.). Horn (1984, 1989) relates the effects of both principles to two antinomic forces identified by Zipf (1949: 19ff.). Both are based on the general principle of **Least Effort**: the I principle allows the speaker to minimise her effort, since she can use the most general, i.e. least informative, expression at hand, and rely on the hearer to enrich it to arrive at the more specific, intended interpretation. The maximal exploitation of this principle, according to Zipf, would lead to the use of just a single word to achieve any imaginable communicative effect; it is therefore termed ‘Force of Unification’. The application of the Q-Principle, on the other hand, allows the hearer to minimise his effort. If the hearer can rely on the speaker to use the most informative expression that she can commit herself to, he does not have to make the effort to further enrich the message himself. The maximal exploitation of this principle would lead to the use of infinitely many words, in order to have a different expression available for every distinction in
meaning imaginable – hence the term ‘Force of Diversification’ is chosen by Zipf.

From the extreme potential results that are invoked by Zipf to characterise each of these forces – the existence of just a single word, or of a different words for every shade of meaning – it is already clear that the two forces counterbalance each other in actual language use. This counterbalance, in fact, is incorporated into the original formulation of the two Maxims of Quantity by Grice (by the phrase “... more informative than is required”) (Horn 1989: 195). Their antinomic character has been identified as a crucial force underlying language variation and language change (see Horn 1984, 1989: 192f., and the references cited there). Because of their complementary effect, the predictive value of these principles is of course limited, but this makes them no less useful as descriptive tools.

The Principle of Quantity and the Principle of Informativeness were discussed in some detail, because they will be referred to throughout Ch. 5, in the description of the meaning and use of the closed-class verbs. Moreover, variation observed in the use of the Jaminjung verbs will be shown to reflect the antinomic tendencies just described.

1.4.3 The notion of ‘event’

Since this study investigates event categorisation in Jaminjung, a clarification of the notion ‘event’ is in order here. For our purposes, an event can be defined as a conceptual representation, as linguistically encoded, which can be assigned boundaries, and/or a ‘location’, in time. Thus, the term ‘event’ is used here in a technical, broad sense comprising all situation types, not in the colloquial, narrow sense where ‘event’ contrasts with ‘activity’ or ‘state’. It is equivalent to the terms ‘situation’ as used, e.g., by Lyons (1977: 483) and Lehmann (1991), and the term ‘state of affairs’ as used, e.g., by Dik (1997).

In the literature, it is frequently claimed that complex predicates encode ‘single events’. In this view, the components of a complex predicate can be described as encoding different subevents of a unitary overall event or ‘macro-event’. An intuitively appealing characterisation of the notion of ‘single event’ is that it is linguistically represented by a single clause. It invokes the ‘functional similarity’ of clauses with a complex predicate to a ‘clause built around a single verb’ (Durie 1997: 321) in a language where predicates – supposedly – mostly

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19 Where necessary, the terms ‘real-world event’ and ‘real-world situation’ will be used (interchangeably) in making reference to extra-linguistic facts.

correspond to simple verbs (but see §7.2.3). The crucial difficulty here is to determine what ‘functional similarity’ means. Mere translation equivalence as postulated by a non-native speaker (e.g. a linguist) is obviously a problematic criterion. From a Whorfian perspective, one would have to argue that a complex predicate has to involve, on some level, a conceptual representation which differs from that of a simple predicate, and therefore may not simply be equated with its simple-predicate translation equivalent in another language. This is a point discussed in some detail by Pawley (1987) and also addressed by Givón (1991).

In §3.2, (canonical) complex predicates in Jaminjung will be defined with respect to prosodic units: all components of the complex predicate have to be part of the same intonation unit. In the case of the Jaminjung complex predicates defined in this way, fortunately, we do not have to rely on non-native speakers’ translation equivalents to assess their functional equivalence with simple predicates. As already mentioned in §1.2, all Jaminjung speakers are also speakers of Northern Territory Kriol (see also §3.5). Compared with Jaminjung, Kriol makes very little use of complex predicates. This is illustrated in (1-2) and (1-3) below, where the Kriol clauses in (1-2b) and (1-3b) represent the translation equivalents spontaneously offered by native speakers for the Jaminjung clauses in (1-2a) and (1-3a). In both cases, a simple Kriol verb corresponds to a complex Jaminjung verb: the complex verb consisting of *gulyu* ‘rinse, wash’ and the verb *-angu* ‘GET/HANDLE’ is translated as *washim* ‘wash’ in (1-2b). The combination of *yurl* ‘chase’ and *-wa* ‘BITE’ is translated as *jeisim* ‘chase’ in (1-3b). Many more spontaneous equivalents of this type are documented in the corpus.

(1-2a)  mali gurrany *gulyu* nganth-*angu*-m ngarrgu thing NEG rinse 2sg:3sg-GET/HANDLE-PRS 1sg.OBL

b)  *yul* nomo *washim* bla mi kloth
2sg NEG wash:TR for 1sg clothes
‘you don’t wash clothes for me’ (DP, FRA201)

(1-3a)

(1-3a)  *yurl*=biyang gani-*wa* wirib-di \ chase=NOW 3sg:3sg-BITE.PST dog-ERG

b)  *imin* jeisim, dog *jeisim* that blekbala
3sg:PST chase:TR dog PST chase:TR DEM Aboriginal.person
‘it chased him, the dog / it chased him, the dog chased that person’ (DP, F02228)

It is important to note that the Kriol translations here are not semantically equivalent to the Jaminjung complex verbs. The verb *-angu* ‘GET/HANDLE’, which is part of the complex verb translating as ‘wash’ in (1-2), entails that the event involves contact between the agent and the patient of the washing (see §5.4.1.1), something which is only implied in the Kriol (or English) translation.
Even more strikingly, the use of the verb -wa ‘BITE’, in combination with the coverb yurl ‘chase’, makes explicit that the chasing involved a threat of biting (it does not entail that the biting was realised, see also §5.4). If it had involved a threat of hitting, the corresponding verb -ma ‘HIT’ would have been used. In the Kriol translation, as in its English equivalent, this semantic distinction is not made; the difference can only be inferred from the nature of the ‘chaser’ argument (dogs are more likely to bite than to hit if they catch someone). In sum, therefore, the combination of elements in a complex verb in Jaminjung may serve to make explicit certain aspects of an event that are only implied in the Kriol translation.

However, the Kriol translations were obviously chosen by Jaminjung speakers themselves as fulfilling an equivalent function to the corresponding complex verbs in Jaminjung. The conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that simple and complex verbs may be equivalent on a functional, but not necessarily on a semantic level. The same point is made by Givón (1991: 120) when he concludes that the (serial verb) complex predicates examined in his paper ‘perform roughly similar speech-processing tasks’ to simple predicates. The notion of ‘unitary (macro-)event’ should therefore be taken to refer to a unit of conceptual packaging for the purpose of structuring discourse, not to a semantic unit.

Unitary events, thus, are those presented by the speaker of a language as a coherent chunk of information. (Therefore, of course, the requirement that they are encoded within the same prosodic unit is crucial). What is presented as one event does not depend on the number of predicates or on the overall semantic complexity of the expression used, nor does it, of course, correspond to any clear-cut boundaries in the real world. However, speakers follow language-specific (or culture-specific) conventions of what may be regarded as a unitary event (see e.g. Pawley 1987, Durie 1997, Bisang 1992: 31f.), which are, presumably, delimited by universal cognitive predispositions. The cross-linguistically valid restrictions on what may be expressed as a single event are still the topic of ongoing investigations. The language-specific restrictions on complex verb formation in Jaminjung (and hence, the restrictions on what is conventionally represented as a single event by Jaminjung speakers) are the topic of this study.