



Te Reo
the Journal of the Linguistic
Society of New Zealand

Volume 68

Issue 1 (*Regular Issue*)

Book review

2025

Pages 3-6

June, 2025

*BOOK REVIEW of VERSTRAETE, JEAN-CHRISTOPHE, 2024. A
DICTIONARY OF MORROBOLAM: A LAMALAMIC
LANGUAGE OF CAPE YORK PENINSULA, AUSTRALIA.
PACIFIC LINGUISTICS: 669. DE GRUYTER MOUTON. ISBN: 978-
3-1113-9762-7.*

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This paper is a contribution from <https://www.nzlingsoc.org/journal/current-issue/>

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Editor: Victoria Chen

Book reviews editor: Eleanor Ridge

**BOOK REVIEW of VERSTRAETE, JEAN-CHRISTOPHE,
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This dictionary offers a comprehensive and ethnographically rich account of the lexicon of Morrobolam, a Paman (Pama-Nyungan; Australia) language previously known by the exonym Umbuygamu. The over 1200 main entries draw on knowledge shared by key contributors: Bob Bassani, Bobby Stewart, Ella Lawrence, King Armstrong, Nancy Gunnawarra, Nellie Salt, Rosie Liddy, Florrie Bassani, Daisy Stewart and Norman King. Given that the language is now in revival mode, this dictionary represents a vital resource for the Morrobolam and academic communities alike, and it has been designed with both audiences firmly in mind.

The dictionary's introductory chapter has three main sections, opening with an introduction to Morrobolam Country (the Princess Charlotte Bay region of Cape York Peninsula's east coast) and its people. This chapter includes an account of: all ten language owners and four further speakers (who cannot claim ownership through the patriline) whose use of Morrobolam has been recorded by the author and/or earlier researchers (from Norman Tindale in 1927, onwards); why the community and author jointly decided to list both owners and non-owning speakers on the dictionary's cover and front pages; and the nature of ten speakers' contributions to the dictionary (and why the archival records of four recorded speakers were not drawn upon). The second introductory section provides a grammatical sketch of Morrobolam, thoughtfully designed to be maximally accessible to the community, now and in the future, while still presenting key linguistic analysis and terminology to satisfy academic linguist users. Finally, the introduction closes with an account of how the dictionary is structured (on which more below). This includes an extremely useful guide to how dictionary users might most easily find the information they are looking for, providing detailed step-by-step answers to questions like "Do you want to find information about a Morrobolam word you already know?" (p. 52) or "Do you want to find a [...] Morrobolam word for which there is no obvious English equivalent?" (p. 53).

At almost 450 pages, the 1200+ main entries in Chapter 2 form the core of the book. Each entry is presented with variant forms (where applicable), IPA transcription and English translation(s). But what really sets this dictionary apart is the rich and detailed information available in the fields that follow. The 'Comment' field includes information about the word's usage, including sociolinguistic variation (e.g. association with Morrobolam vs Meramangalma clan varieties, or different generations), grammatical restrictions and peculiarities, and how the particular word's denotation differs from the denotata of other words in the semantic neighbourhood (e.g. distinguishing characteristics of like plants and animals).

This information is provided along with the initials of the speaker who provided it, not only acknowledging their vital contribution to the work, but providing context which may prove crucial to future (re)interpretations. The ‘Comments’ field also hosts notes regarding semantically or formally related Morrobolam words. This is particularly helpful where the English translation of the head word is ambiguous, or extends to meanings not included within the sense of the Morrobolam term (clarified by presentation of the Morrobolam terms with similar meanings but differing usage conditions), or cannot be confidently determined from the available corpus. The bases for the author’s inferences in such cases are meticulously documented; for example, the word *erampinh* denotes both the ‘freshwater mussel’ and the ‘bolly beech’ (tree). It is of course possible that these could be unrelated homonyms, but while the nature of the connection between the tree and shellfish has not yet been revealed (to the author or other sources), it is very usefully noted that “the neighbouring language Umpithamu also uses one form (not related to the Morrobolam form) for the same two meanings” (p. 176), which strongly suggests some metonymic connection between the two (cf. Evans, 1997).

Cultural knowledge—including relevant traditional practices, social structure and so on—is drawn on both in support of lexicographical choices and to illustrate word meanings. This information will of course also be invaluable in the community’s understanding and/or revival of traditional practices and their interconnection with language use. For example, the observation that the leaves of the *erampinh* ‘bolly beech’ (above) are “used for medicine (boiled in water, and the infusion applied to mouth or eye sores)” (p. 176), or that *erama* “refers to using water to remove toxins from plants (like *opar* ‘karol’), locally known as ‘watering’” (p. 176). The regular (explicitly marked) use of the local variety of English in both headword translations and the Comment field (e.g. ‘watering’ above) is a succinct way to connect with locally meaningful categories, and far more informative than translations in standardised Australian English. Conversely, the dictionary also makes frequent reference to academic literature. This is seen, e.g., in the Comment: “*Urramrha* refers to the wax in sugarbag (actually a mixture of wax and plant resins, see Heard 2016). *Urramrha* was used as an adhesive to stick parts of artefacts together” (p. 452), or in discussing the connection between the *othal* ‘navel, umbilical cord’ (p. 364), *othelu* ‘namesake’ (p. 367), and the naming of babies at birth. The dictionary is thus not only a rich resource in and of itself, but connects its users to a much wider web of resources on Morrobolam’s social, cultural and ecological context, of relevance to both academic and community-based readers.

The ‘Identification’ field provides the basis for identification of plants and animals (including explicit mention of mediation through equivalence in neighbouring languages where relevant), and indicates where this identification is problematic or tentative, making room for new evidence in the future while still providing users with as much information as is currently available. For instance, the translation of *kalpurang* “a type of bird, possibly a frigatebird” (p. 254) gracefully combines a scientifically necessary statement of uncertainty, while also describing the evidence for the tentative identification given,¹ which readers may adopt, challenge or pursue further according to their goals. The detailed acknowledgement of photographs and Australia-wide and regional surveys of native animals used in identification is not only of great help in evaluating the relevant entries themselves, but also useful for communities and field linguists documenting terms for local flora and fauna in other languages. These notes build upon Chapter 1’s (§3.3.5) excellent discussion of the principles used in identifying species.

Further to this admirable transparency in acknowledging gaps in the data and source ambiguities, the dictionary is also explicit about lexical gaps that are true to the linguistic or

¹ “*Kalpurang* is described (FB) as a black bird with long wings, that follows the beach. IDENTIFICATION: Possibly *fregata minor*, great frigatebird; tentative identification of the Umpithamu equivalent *yaaral*, based on general photographs (FB), see Verstraete (2020a: 388).” (p. 254)

cultural system (as opposed to the simple lack of coverage of documentary record). For example, it is helpfully noted that *enhdher* ‘lotus, red lily (local)’ “is known by a single term; most other lilies have two terms for edible parts, one for the seed pod and another for the roots” (p. 167), seemingly due to the fact that it is only the seeds that are eaten in this case.

Entries are richly exemplified with sentences from the Morrobolam corpus, noting the speaker, genre (mostly texts, rather than elicitation), and relevant contextual information. For example, *adha* (“a general term for different types of shark, including ones that are eaten”, p58) is exemplified by the sentence “*Adha ngana ten litnil, layna garran litnil. Layna tnyan latna*. A shark came for us here, it pulled our lines. We left the lines [because they were broken]. (RL, narrative)” (p. 58). Or *aparr* ‘blister’ is illustrated by “*Liminh athal nyan ya. Alam-unarr darram ya. Alam aparr halamam ya*. I’ve sung too much. My knuckles hurt [accompanying singing by drumming on a flour tin]. Blisters come out on my hand. (BS, volunteered)”. These examples, and other speaker insights noted in the comment field, greatly enrich the dictionary and provide even an outsider with some feeling for the individual contributors; they must surely be much more meaningful for Morrobolam families.

Finally, many entries include useful observations regarding the head word’s morphological and etymological structure, again noting relevant evidence and level of certainty (e.g. that it is believed to be a compound on the basis of the stress pattern, or that there is phonetic resemblance to a presumed etymological source but the semantic connection is unclear).

Chapter 3 provides an alphabetical index of terms organised by their English translations (essentially a finder list), followed by Chapter 4’s very detailed thematically-organised list of terms (encompassing 41 thematic (sub)categories). The book closes with an index of species identifications (Chapter 5) and list of references.

Dictionaries—a cornerstone of the Boasian trilogy—are enjoying something of a renaissance in Australia. Recent publications span from the behemoth Warlpiri dictionary (Laughren et al., 2022), produced over 60 years with input from hundreds of speakers, to much smaller but no less precious records of the lexica of past generations (many of which, like the present work, were supported by the AIATSIS Australian Indigenous Languages Dictionary Project). A Dictionary of Morrobolam offers a prime example of how much dictionaries have to offer academic and local communities alike. It will surely support many future typological, diachronic, ethnobotanical and other academic studies, alongside the community-led revival of this complex and specific language.

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