

The expression of knowing in Australian languages

William B. McGregor

Abstract

This paper pursues a rather poorly studied theme in Australianist linguistics, albeit one that I have been fascinated in for a number of years, the expression of thought in the Indigenous languages of Australia, e.g. in McGregor (2021) on thought complements and McGregor (in press) on mistaken beliefs. The paper extends on these earlier investigations by dealing with the expression of knowing and ignorance (not knowing) in Australian languages. The paper takes a typological perspective, looking at the range of lexical items and grammatical constructions employed in expressing these two concepts. A number of languages lexicalise both knowledge and ignorance, though mostly as nominals (rather than as types of verb, as in the case of thinking). I will explore the basic grammatical properties of these nominals, including their use in complement constructions ('know that something'), as in the following Nyulnyul example (note that *-mungk* is indeed a nominal, not an inflecting verb, as it takes the same pronominal prefixes as inalienably possessed nominals, not inflecting verbs):

- (1) *arri* *nga-mungk* *angk-in* *i-n-nyu*
not 1MIN-know what-ERG 3NOM-CM-get
 'I don't know who took it.'

I will also examine the semantics of the words, which frequently encompasses both procedural and declarative knowledge. The investigation will be based on a sample of around 50 traditional Aboriginal languages, partly a convenience sample, and partly a representative one (major genetic groupings and geographical regions are covered, even if somewhat unevenly).

Keywords: not know, ignorant, knowledgeable, know

References

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McGregor, William B. in press. On the expression of mistaken beliefs in Australian languages. To appear in *Linguistic Typology*.

Department of Linguistics, Cognitive Science and Semiotics,
The School of Communication and Culture,
Aarhus University, Jens Chr. Skous Vej 2, Office 1485-617,
DK-8000 Århus C, Denmark
linwmg@cc.au.dk