

The developing understanding of morphosyntax in the languages of Victoria - 1835-1905

Stephen Morey

Centre for Research on Language Diversity

s.morey@Latrobe.edu.au

Efforts at what we now term ‘language documentation’, arose from a range of motivations, and go back to the earliest period of British rule in Victoria, starting with George Augustus Robinson in the 1830s, and running through until R.H. Mathews’ publications in the early years after Federation.

In this paper, I will present evidence of how these earlier figures attempted to come to an understanding of the basic morphosyntax of these languages - via pronoun paradigms, verb paradigms and attempts at understanding case marking systems.

While the verb and pronoun paradigms of R.H. Mathews, in both his publications and manuscript notes, are generally more perceptive and comprehensive than earlier recorders, they are not without problems, and attempts were made by many earlier people to present such paradigms.

In particular earlier recorders like William Thomas and James Dawson provided a lot more language examples in the form of sentences

Since Mathews, for example, had read all the available publications, and made notes that are still present in his papers, we can view the 19th century work on these languages as a developing academic process.

It is only after Federation that this work stops completely, as Luise Hercus pointed out in 1965, writing that

“no proper first-hand investigation of any Victorian language had been carried out for precisely sixty years, since the work of R.H. Mathews”

Some modern appraisals: Stockigt (2015) and (2017)

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Stockigt (2015) discussed Werkaya - as recorded by Hagenauer (in Smyth 1878) and Mathews (1902) and Ganai as discussed by Bulmer (in Smyth 1878).

- “In both grammars the nominals labelled Ergative stand in peripheral case function and are translated ‘with X’.”

But excluded

C. Smith’s description of Bunganditj spoken in the southeast corner of South Australia (1880), J. Dawson’s descriptions of Jab-Wurrung and Peek-Whurrung spoken in western Victoria (1881) and W. Thomas’ analysis of Woiwurrung spoken in Melbourne (Brough Smyth 1878, vol. II:118-120).

Adding “These works tend to be sketchy grammatical notes appended to larger vocabularies or ethnographic descriptions.”

Blake (1991: 65) writing about the language of the Melbourne area

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Almost all the grammatical information available comes from the grammatical sketches provided by R. H. Mathews for the 'Thaguwurru language' (manuscript and published version) and the 'Woiwurru dialect' (published version plus manuscript version entitled 'Yarra language'). Green supplies some dozens of sentences with translations (not always accurate) and lists a few grammatical forms. Thomas too lists a few grammatical forms, some glossed incorrectly, and gives translations of some religious texts. However, these translations are very poor and for the most part they must be disregarded. They are largely ungrammatical.

The early attempts: Robinson

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Robinson (1839-1852) (transcribed in Clark 2000)
Notebooks with word lists, lists of personal names (sometimes with their country names) and place names; no attempt to comprehensively record grammar, but some grammatical information, such as lists of question words:

Robinson (MS A7086 pt1, p1) Clark's transcription

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win.dun.ger:

win.dung:

win.dow:

win.dow.wer.reen: where.

ton.dare.re.yer: like it.

ween.yare.rer: what is it, or, what's that.

nor.al.lum are said to be plenty sulky.

mung.boon.nen.dung: warm.

Robinson (MS A7086 pt1, p1)

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Win-dun-ger = } where
Win-dung
Win-dow
Win-dow we seen
Ton-dare re-ger
like it

Ween-yare-rer

What is it or what that

Nor-al-lum
are said to be
Plenty Sulky



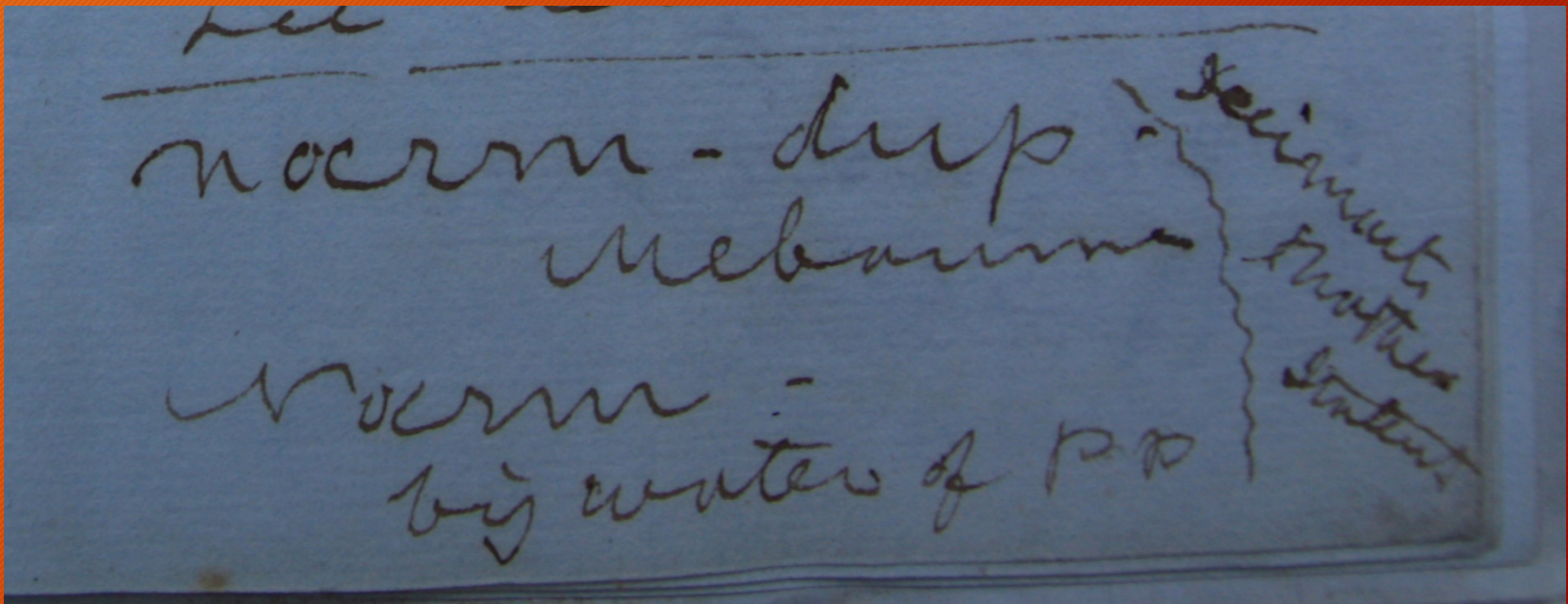
The mark Round the eye
come into Pipe clay
called ar-um-bolt

A case ending

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Narm.dup: Melbourne

Narm: big waters of P[ort] P[hillip].



William Thomas - examples from the language of Melbourne

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In his manuscripts, there is an example of a listing of suffixes (particles affixed) which mark some case relationships.

This includes *-ut* and *-oot* meaning ‘in’ or ‘on’

-dap meaning ‘in’ (seen in the name of Melbourne in Robinson)

-o which he translates with ‘the’

Blake (1991: 65) “Thomas’s *-dap* is not used by Thomas himself in the translation of religious texts and must be regarded as suspect.”

However we can now confirm it’s use in both Robinson and in Thomas’ manuscripts.

A full assessment of the work of all the 19th century work has to include a study of the manuscript sources as well as the published ones. And it needs to search for confirmation of paradigms in sentence examples

Conjunctions	
Particles (affixed)	Prepositions & Terminations
in ut; bikut in ground, willumut bigout on the ground	at the - ter ado Kowunado at the top
on oot, bigoot on the D° g for k harmony	teno
in dap; korongdap in the boat	
in wa, weinwa in the fire	
to or from a place – Sydneywa to Sydney	
¹ to or at – oit – Melbornoit, to Melbourne	Conjunctions
the, in parts of body, āter, Kowanāter the head	and bar, weing bar parn fire and water
the o – is sometimes used as tenango the foot	" ge elegantly forms Plu & Con Koolinge Bagrook Men and women
in the – o – Weino in the fire	
wā also as exclamation Wā here	also – tey; for Tuduk
¹ kuding Melbourne at Melbourne in D° Kuding Lettery in the box at the ...	

Particles, affixed &c.

Wapulany

Prepositions & Terminations

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in ut; Bikut in Ground, Willumut
 on oot, Bigoot on the D^o = g. fork hammer
 in dap, Korongdap in the Rock
 in wa, Weinwa in the fire
 to or from a place - Sydney Wa to Sydney
 to or at oit - Melbourne oit; to Melbourne
 the ater, in parts of body Kounata the head
 the, O - is sometimes used as Tenango the foot
 in the - o - Weino in the fire
 wa also as exclamation Wa here

at the - ter ado - Kounade at the top
 Teno

Conjunctions

And - bar. being barpam Fair & White
 a - ge elegantly forms But for Norlinge
 Ragrock Men & Women
 also - toy; For Saduk

1 Kuding Melbourne at Melbourne
 in - D^o I Kuding Letter, in the Box
 at Burnin

Mal- 'let, potential' (1)

A paradigm

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William Thomas Manuscripts, State Library of New South Wales,
MS 214, Section 5, Item 1 c009590121h.jpg:

	Marlo umarler - let their be light
Grammar	Mal-mardip - let him cry
	D ^o - yengnip - D ^o D ^o sing
	D ^o - tunnewă - D ^o D ^o talk
	Mallun nargip - Let me Corroberry
	D ^o - Prombean - D ^o D ^o smoke
	D ^o - Wolwonut - D ^o D ^o run

Mal- ‘let, potential’ (1)

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Note that Hercus (1986:45) records *-ap* as a purposive suffix in a related language, Wemba Wemba

Throughout his papers, Thomas gives a number of examples like *Mullunnanger* translated as ‘Let me see’. This is analysed as consisting of:

Mal-an	nganga
Let-1sg	see

And can be translated as ‘Let (me) see.’, ‘I might see.’ The *-an* ending for 1st person can be seen in previous slide.

Mathews (1902:92) recorded the same word as *mella*:

Conditional mood

Singular	Perhaps I will sit	<i>Mella ngullambunnhan</i>
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and so on for the remaining persons and numbers.”

Note that in North Western Kulin languages, *mala* is ‘demonstrative of further distance’ (Hercus 1986: 87) in Werkaya, and recorded as a 3rd singular pronoun in many examples

Werkaya (Wimmera Language) Spieseke in the Moravian Papers (1860s-70s?)

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Kurtuk	jüngster Bruder	Younger brother
Kurtek	mein jüngster Bruder	My younger brother
Kurtin	Dein jüngster Bruder	Your younger brother
Kurtangeil	Sein jüngster Bruder	His younger brother

The form *-ngeil* is elsewhere recorded, as *ngal(i)* meaning the 1st dual inclusive

Werkaya (Wimmera Language) Spieseke in the Moravian Papers (1860s-70s?)

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janjan	(gehe ich) ich gehe	I go, am going
jannake	du gehst (also used in imperative, as in 'you go!')	You (familiar) go, are going
Janna kinja	er geht	He goes, is going
Jannanga	wir gehen	We go, are going
Jannakoat	j.....krat – ihr geht	You (plural) go, are going
jannakoait	sie gehen	They go, are going

Werkaya (Wimmera Language) Spieseke in the Moravian Papers (1860s-70s?)

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jerrin	gegangen	Gone
jerrin nan	ich ging	I went
jerrin ere	du gingst	You went
jerrin kinja	er ging	He went
malla jerrin	gegangen haben	Has gone [should be <u>sind</u> gegangen]
mallan jerrin	ich bin gegangen	I have gone
mallar jerrin	du bist gegangen	You have gone

Spieseke (original)

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gerroin, geyangon
gerroin nan, is ying
gerroinere, is ying
gerroin Kinga, is ying
malla gerroin, geyangon sabon
malla gerroin, is biu geyangon
malla gerroin, is biu geyangon
malla gerroin Kinga, is biu geyangon

Excursus: an early discussion about spelling (Smyth 1878 II: 2)

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The sounds of the letters that are used in writing English do not convey the sounds of the words of the native tongue. It is often impossible to write down correctly any word beginning with B. It is frequently sounded like P. *Boorp* (Loddon) is written *Poorp* (Lower Murray), and *Baramul* is in like manner written *Paramul*. D is so sounded as to perplex the enquirer. One word will suffice to show this

	<i>Dyah</i>	Upper Richardson.
	<i>Tyar</i>	Lake Hindmarsh.
	<i>Tha</i>	Birregurra.
	<i>Tcha</i>	Glenelg.
Ground	<i>Jah</i>	Hamilton.
	<i>Djah</i>	Glenorchy.
	<i>D'tchar</i>	Murray.
	<i>Char</i>	Lower Loddon.
	<i>Yar</i>	Horsham.

D has its proper sound in such words as *Bidderup* (dead), *Turdenden* (new), *Urdin* (straight), &c.

Dawson (1881: lxxxvii): Pronouns

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PRONOUNS.

I	Gnatook.
My	...	Gnan (affixed to noun).
Mine	...	Gnatonghatt.
Me	...	Gnan (affixed to verb).
We	...	Gnatook.
Our	...	Gniiyæ (affixed to noun).
Ours	...	Gnatook gnat.
Us	...	Gniiyæyuung.
You (those)	...	Gnutook, or gnin.
Yours (thine)	...	Gnutook gnat, or gnu (affixed to noun).
You—plural	...	Gnutook gnuutæn.

Dawson's pronouns

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Shows an understanding of:

- Different cases
- Bound and Free forms

But shows no evidence of dual forms and inclusive and exclusive

Dawson (1881: lxxxv & lxxxvi)

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SENTENCES ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE CASES OF NOUNS.

An opossum runs up the tree.

Kan	beewætnan	wuurotæ	kuuramuuk.
Going	up	tree	opossum.

My dog bit the leg of the opossum.

Buundan	pirn'guunong	kuuramuuka	kaal	gnan.
Bit	leg	opossum	dog	mine.

Give the opossum to the dog.

Wuukakæ	kaal	kuuramuuka.
Give	dog	opossum.

Take the opossum from the dog.

Kuuruin	kartakæ	kaal	kuuramuuka.
Take	from	dog	opossum.

The opossum sits on a branch of the tree.

Kannæ	gneengannæ	kuuramuuk	wuurkæ	nuung.
Up	sits	opossum	branch	on.

Dawson's case forms

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Ergative

There is an expectation that this language would have an ergative case marking the subject of transitive verbs.

Blake (2003) does include such sentences from other sources, but we do not see an ergative *-a* in the sentence 'my dog bit the leg of the opossum' though we do see it in 'give the opossum to the dog' explained by Blake as "the ergative is also used to mark the gift in a giving sentence"

Mathews - verb paradigms - Thaguwurru language (Mathews (1902: 89)

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Active Voice.

Indicative Mood—Present Tense.

Singular	{	1st Person	I beat,	Tyilbuinan
		2nd	„ Thou beatest,	Tyilbuiner
		3rd	„ He beats,	Tyilbuin
Dual	{	1st Person	{ We, incl., beat,	Tyilbuingul
			{ We, excl., beat,	Tyilbuingun
		2nd	„ You beat,	Tyilbuinbul
		3rd	„ They beat,	Tyilbuinbulláin
Tripl	{	1st Person	{ We, incl., beat,	Tyilbuingunyinbaiap
			{ We, excl., beat,	Tyilbuingunninyubaiap
		2nd	„ You beat,	Tyilbuinatbaiap
		3rd	„ They beat,	Tyilbuinurbaiap
Plural	{	1st Person	{ We, incl., beat,	Tyilbuingunyin
			{ We, excl., beat,	Tyilbuingunninyu
		2nd	„ You beat,	Tyilbuinat
		3rd	„ They beat,	Tyilbuinur

Mathews - verb paradigms - Thaguwurru language (Mathews (1902: 89)

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Past Tense.

Singular	{ 1st Person	I beat,	Tyilbuddhan
	2nd	„ Thou beatedst,	Tyilbuddhar
	3rd	„ He beat,	Tyilbai

Future Tense.

Singular	{ 1st Person	I will beat,	Tyilbunnhan
	2nd	„ Thou wilt beat,	Tyilbunnher
	3rd	„ He will beat.	Tyilbuñ

Imperative Mood.

Singular—Beat, Tyilbak. Trial—Beat, Tyilbagubaiap

Dual—Beat, Tyilbakwula. Plural—Beat, Tyilbagu

The negatives are Ngabük tyilbak. Ngabükwula tyilbak.
Ngabugabaiap tyilbak. Ngabuga tyilbak.

Conditional Mood.

Singular—Perhaps I will beat, Gullai tyilbunnha

Dual—Perhaps we, incl., will beat, Gullai tyilbunnhungal

Trial—Perhaps „ Gullai tyilbunnunginyinbaiap

Plural—Perhaps „ Gullai tyilbunnunginyin

Most parts of these paradigms are confirmed by example sentences from multiple sources. For example: (Sentence from Thomas papers, analysis from Morey 1998)

Mongeannul (S)

‘You and me go and work’

mungga-ngal

make-1Dl.Incl

“You and I make, work.”

Mathews Gippsland Paradigm

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Sing	I speak	Dhanganety
	Thou speakest	Dhangandu
	He speaks	Dhangga
Sing	I spoke	Dhangadha
	Thou spokest	Dhaggani
	He spoke	Dhangañ
Sing	I shall speak	Dhangginga
	Thou -- --	Dhangginnin
	He -- --	Dhanggiñ

But these forms mostly can't be confirmed in sentence examples from a range of sources.

Eve Fesl (1985: 119) suggested that on the basis of Mathews' published works, notes and sentences, two suffixes could be established

Non-past	Past
-n	-ndhu

But the data is not consistent. Fesl (1985: 120)

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A count of frequencies of tense forms used by Mathews in his sentences illustrates some of the difficulties, viz:

<u>Present</u>	<u>Future</u>		<u>Past</u>	
-n	22/31	-n	3/8	- <u>n</u> du 7/20
-nd(<u>d</u>)a	7/31	- <u>n</u> du	3/8	-(ri) <u>d</u> u 4/20
- <u>n</u> du	2/31	-nd(<u>d</u>)a	2/8	-u 3/20
				a
				-ngu 2/20
				-du 1/20
				-n 1/20
				-nd(<u>d</u>)a 2/20

Some preliminary conclusions

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- Records of grammatical constructions and attempts to understand grammar from the earliest times
- A continuous development in the sophistication of analysis from 1830s to 1902
- R.H. Mathews, while being the most sophisticated and comprehensive recorder, did form the view that the grammars of most of the languages were basically the same and probably tried to 'even out' irregularities
- A comprehensive study of these works needs to look at manuscript sources closely as well as published sources
- Complete lack of interest in the languages of Victoria in the 60 years after Federation. This places our tradition of linguistics at odds with the tradition in the USA where Franz Boas published the *Handbook of American Indian Languages* in 1911 and this led to a substantial expansion in work on these languages.
- The 'Colonial' period was one of considerable interest in and research about Indigenous languages and cultures, in contrast to the post Federation period. (Nick's slide showed the decline in publications between 1875-1899 - 644 publications and 1900-1924 - 273; 1925-1949 1--)

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