

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

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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 19<sup>th</sup> 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)

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

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 = }  
Win-dun } where  
Win-dow  
win dow ma een  
Ton dare te yet  
like it

ween.yare-rie

Nor-al-lum

the land to be  
plenty sulky



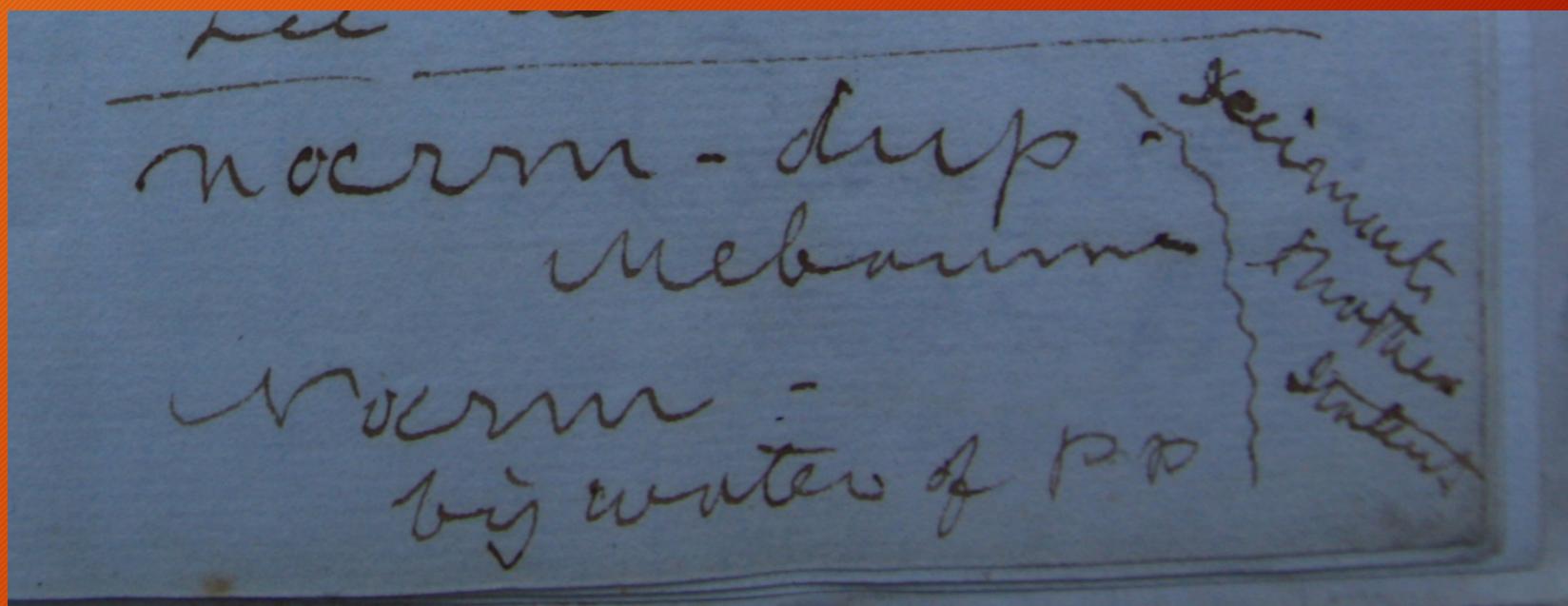
The mark Rammed the  
Dome into Pipe clay  
Collect azimuth

# 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>o</sup> 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	
<sup>1</sup> 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
<sup>1</sup> kuding Melbourne at Melbourne in D <sup>o</sup> Kuding Lettery in the box	

Particles, affixes &c.

Adverbially

in - ak; Bikak in ground, Willamut  
Bigout on the ground  
on - oot, Bigout on the D<sup>o</sup> - g. fork harmony  
in - oap, horongap in the Roak  
in - wa, Weinwa in the fire  
to or from a place - Sydney, Wa to Sydney  
to or at - oit - Melbourn oit; to Melbourne  
the - ak, in parts of body, Kournata with head  
the, D<sup>o</sup> - is sometimes used as tenang<sup>o</sup> the foot  
in the - D<sup>o</sup> - Wein in the fire  
Wa also as exclamation Wa here

at the - tar aoo - Kournado at the top  
teno

Prepositions & Terminations

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Conjunction

And - bar. weing her form Fair & Melba  
a - ge elegantly forms Chukor Koolinge  
Bagoock Men & Women  
also - teij; for Suduk

1. Kuding Melbourn, at Melbourn  
in - D<sup>o</sup> 1 Kuding - aitory, 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 <sup>o</sup> - yengnip - D <sup>o</sup> D <sup>o</sup> sing
	D <sup>o</sup> - tunnewă - D <sup>o</sup> D <sup>o</sup> talk
	Mallun nargip - Let me Corroberry
	D <sup>o</sup> - Prombean - D <sup>o</sup> D <sup>o</sup> smoke
	D <sup>o</sup> - Wolwonut - D <sup>o</sup> D <sup>o</sup> run

# Mal- ‘let, potential’ (1)

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 1<sup>st</sup> person can be seen in previous slide.

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

Conditional mood

Singular      Perhaps I will sit      Mella ngullambunnhan

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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 gegangen</u> ]
mallan jerrin	ich bin gegangen	I have gone
mallar jerrin	du bist gegangen	You have gone

# Spieseke (original)

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jerriu, yaganyu  
jerrin-nan, nif ying  
jerrin-e, nif ying  
jerriu Ringa, nif ying  
malla jerriu, yaganyu fabu  
malla jerriu, nif baw yaganyu  
malla jerriu, nif baw yaganyu  
malla jerriu Ringa, nif yaganyu

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

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	...	... Gniyæ (affixed to noun).
Ours	...	... Gnatook gnat.
Us	...	... Gniyæyuung.
You (those)	...	... Gnutook, or gniñ.
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

## 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 wuirkæ 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	

Trial	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	Dhanggani
	He spoke	Dhanggañ
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	-ŋdu	7/20
-nd(d)a	7/31	-ŋdu	3/8	-(ri)du	4/20
-ŋdu	2/31	-nd(d)a	2/8	-u	3/20
				a	
				-ngu	2/20
				-du	1/20
				-n	1/20
				-nd(d)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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