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S.K. Ray
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### KALAW KAWAW VERBS

by Rod Kennedy

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MURINBATA NOUN CLASSES

Chester S. Street

1. DESCRIPTION OF NOUN CLASSES

Each noun in Murinbatal belongs to one of ten noun classes.\(^1\) The class marker in each case precedes the noun, although is not obligatory.\(^2\) These noun classes, including their negative forms, can also be used alone conveying the meaning of anything listed in that particular class.\(^3\)

Negation to all but two of the noun classes can be made with the prefix
The exceptions are da (No. 4) and murrinh (No. 9) which are negated by the use of the word manangka.

The noun classes are as follows:

1. kardu
   Human beings, male and female (Aboriginal only)
   Human spirits, i.e. spirit children and the soul
   Kinsip terminology

   e.g. kardu thipnam 'black person (Aboriginal)'
   kardu ngarrithngarrith 'spirit children'
   kardu ngepan 'soul/spirit of a living person'
   kardu pule 'old man, leader, husband'

   Negative form = makardu 'no person, no-one, etc.'

2. ku
   Animals, birds, insects and marine life
   The flesh of the above and also of man
   The spirit world (other than in No. 1)
   Human beings, male and female (non-Aboriginal)
   The products of animals, birds, insects, and
   marine life, i.e. honey, eggs, nest

   e.g. ku lawarnka 'wallaby'
   ku kananganthan 'emu'
   ku tharnu 'barramundi'
   ku ngen 'flesh/meat'
   ku karrath 'human ghost'
   ku Kangkarlmuwu 'God' (lit. the spirit who
   abides above)
   ku thithay 'wild honey'
   ku dirri 'bird's nest'

   Negative form = maku 'no animal, no bird, no flesh,
   etc.'

3. nanthi
   Most natural substances and objects, i.e. stone, wax,
   trees, grass, saltwater, etc.
   The inedible parts of animals, etc. (bones, feathers,
   etc.) and plants (bark, leaves)
   Body parts of human beings
   Most natural phenomena, i.e. fog, smoke, wind, heavenly
   bodies
   Urine and human milk
   Artifacts
   Implements
   Song and dance
Most introduced articles, i.e. billy can, truck, petrol, books, paper, etc.

E.g.
- nanthi thay  'tree'
- nanthi lalingkin  'salt water, ocean'
- nanthi murnu  'bone'
- nanthi mange  'hand'
- nanthi thapuk  'fog, dew'
- nanthi yi  'dilly bag'
- nanthi kiningka  'digging stick'
- nanthi thamarl  'a song'

Negative form = mananthi 'no trees, no wind, nothing, etc.'

4. da
Camps, living places
Localities
Time
Seasons

E.g.
- ngarra da  'at home'
- da Nangu  'Nangu (place name)'
- da thipinha  'night time'
- da mirrangan  'cold season'

Negative form = manangka da 'no camp, no time, etc.'

5. mi
Vegetable foodstuffs
Fruit
Faeces

E.g.
- mi thanka  'yam'
- mi kugalng  'fruit from Kurrajong tree'

Negative form = mami 'no food, etc.'

6. kura
Fresh water, rain
Any liquid that is drinkable (except milk, No. 3)

E.g.
- kura napilin  'fresh water river/creek'
- kura yelyel  'rain'

Negative form = makura 'no water, no rain, etc.'

7. thu
Offensive weapons, i.e. boomerang, fighting sticks, etc.
(not spears, No. 8)
Thunder and lightning
Playing cards
e.g. thu kuragadha 'boomerang'  
thu malarntath 'thunder and lightning'

Note:
Nouns from other classes can become members of this class if used for offensive or destructive purposes.

e.g. nanthi palyirr 'a stone' can become thu palyirr  
if for example it is used to throw at someone.  
nanthi wirirr 'the wind' can become thu wirirr  
if it is of a destructive nature like a cyclone.

Negative form = mathu 'no weapons, etc.'

8. thamul All types of spears

e.g. thamul ngaramath 'one-sided barbed spear'  
    thamul nguni 'short light bamboo spear'

Negative form = mathamul 'no spears'

9. murrinh Speech, language, names  
Places associated with talk or learning  
Non-Aboriginal songs  
Stories, legends, news

e.g. murrinh mamay 'children's talk'  
murrinh thelerrthe 'news'  
murrinh school 'school'

Negative form = manangka murrinh 'no word, no story, etc.'

10. thungku Fire  
    Firearms  
    Electricity

e.g. thungku len 'hot coals'  
thungku thay 'fire wood'  
thungku gun 'gun, rifle'

Negative form = mathungku 'no fire, etc.'
NOTES

1. Murinbata (Murrinh-patha) belongs to the Garaman Language Family, and is spoken by approximately 1,000 people, the majority of whom live at Port Keats—Wadeye, Northern Territory, 250 kilometres to the south-west of Darwin, Australia.

2. This list has been based upon an original analysis by Stanner. He referred to these noun classes as 'Existence Classes'. (Stanner, p. 74.)

Tryon also lists noun classes he has discovered in the Daly River languages. He gives examples from sixteen Daly River languages and dialects, the majority of which have 4 and 5 noun classes, and a few having 7 and 8 noun classes. He summarises these noun classes as follows (p. 293):

- Class 1: Body parts, kinship terms, natural phenomena.
- 2: Animals hunted for meat.
- 3: Vegetable food and plants.
- 4: Wooden implements, trees, weapons
- 5: Trees (as opposed to implements, wood products).
- 6: Male humans.
- 7: Female humans.
- 8: Domesticated animals.

3. Grammatical speech requires the noun classes to precede the nouns in all cases, although in common speech it is quite normal for them to be omitted. However, they tend to be obligatory when used to classify introduced words.

   e.g. *mi banana* 'banana'
   *nanthi oil* 'oil'

4. The use of a noun class by itself does not create any confusion in conversation as it is used only when representing a given topic which is already known to the listener.

For example, within a given paragraph the topic, for instance, could be about hunting wallaby, i.e. *ku lawarnka*. Once the listener knows the topic, the speaker need only refer to it by its noun class thereafter, i.e. *ku*, and wallaby is understood.
REFERENCES
