

## Underspecification and constructional meaning in Kujireray

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I use data from the Joola language Kujireray to show that lexical stems in this language are underspecified for meaning. Stems convey numerous meanings depending on the morphosyntactic context into which there are inserted, including being flexible for word class. These related meanings form networks, whose structure is determined by conceptual structures linking actions or states with entities such as agents or results, and by socio-culturally specific encyclopaedic knowledge and conventionalised metaphorical extensions. This is illustrated in the table below, using the stem *fox*, associated with the conceptual domain of burying.

Table 1 Nouns formed from stem *fox* BURY

	<b>form</b>	<b>gloss</b>
a	<i>na-fog-e waf</i> 3S-BURY-PERF thing	‘He buried something.’
b	<i>umu ni e-fox waf</i> COP LOC CL-BURY thing	‘He is burying something.’
c	<i>fu-fox</i> CL-BURY	‘grave’
d	<i>ka-fox</i> CL-FOX	‘burial’
e	<i>na-fog-e fu-new-ol</i> 3S-BURY-PERF CL-debt-3S.POSS	‘He paid his debt.’

In a verbal context, as in (a), or in the verbal noun *e-fox* in (b), the concept evoked is the action of burying. The noun *fu-fox* in (c) represents a general conceptual relation - the result of the action – with the additional specification ‘grave’ resulting from the fact that a grave is an culturally salient entity associated with the digging action. Like *e-fox*, *ka-fox* in (d) is considered a verbal noun since it refers to the action rather than any concrete entity. However, it is common in Kujireray that a verbal noun in *ka-* (as opposed to the more productive *e-*) is associated with a more specialised meaning – here the act of burying a person. Finally, in (e) the root is used in a verbal morphosyntactic context, with subject agreement and aspect markers, in a metaphorical sense, where to bury a debt means to pay it.

I explore the hypothesis that there are regular correspondences between the conceptual relations subsumed within these clusters. In particular, I focus on the role of noun class markers in the construction of meaning. I show how these classes are not mere category markers, but carry their own meaning – also underspecified - which interact with and elaborate the semantics of lexical roots in a flexible but constrained way. I argue that the noun class prefix and the lexical stem jointly contribute meaning (cf. Kihm 2000, Lucy 2000, Sagna 2008, Cobbinah 2013). The data provides evidence for

the constructional nature of meaning in Kujireray, and supports the position that properties such as word class should be recognised in this way as well.

### References

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