

A note on noun classes

Noun Classes are categories of grammatical 'agreement' governed by nouns, the names of things. Many languages have noun class agreement systems. For example,

- French, Spanish, Ndjébbana and Na-kara languages each have two noun classes: 1. 'Masculine' and 2. 'Feminine'.

We describe these two noun classes in terms of 'meaning-based' class membership, masculine and feminine gender, because names for men and mythologically male creatures govern Masculine agreement and names for women and mythologically female creatures govern Feminine agreement. However many things do not have inherent sex or gender, and there is no obvious basis for class membership. For example, in French language it's a mystery why *le ciel* 'the ceiling' governs Masculine agreement, or why *la fenêtre* 'the window' governs Feminine agreement. Learners just must remember which nouns govern what class of agreement.

- German and English languages each have three noun classes: 1. 'Masculine' (he), 2. 'Feminine' (she) and 3. 'Neuter' (it).
- Bininj Kunwok, Kunbarlang and Burarra languages each have four noun classes: 1. 'Masculine', 2. 'Feminine', 3. 'plants, material culture, culture' and 4. 'geographic (country, locations, topographic features, body parts, air, sky) and abstract (time, language, ideas, qualities)'.

We describe these four noun classes in terms of 'meaning-based' class membership, but in each of these languages there are exceptions – for example the names of some items of material culture govern class 1 'Masculine' or class 2 'Feminine' agreement instead of class 3 'plant, material culture and culture'. Learners just must remember which nouns govern agreement in what class. Also, in Bininj Kunwok there is variation across different dialects in the assignment of words to noun classes. This text was produced by speakers of Kuninjku dialect, so it contains the agreement pattern used by Kuninjku speakers.

In Kuninjku dialect the agreement prefixes for the four noun classes are:

1. Masculine *na-*;
 2. Feminine *ngal-*;
 3. Plants, material culture and culture *man-*;
 4. geographic and abstract *kun-*.
- Third person nouns and nominal expressions govern agreement in these four classes.

Words are like Leggo, Hyphens are like trainer wheels

In Bininj Kunwok, words are analogous to creations built from Leggo pieces. Leggo creations are assembled from small blocks that fit together in regular ways. Each small block contributes to the whole structure. Some pieces are necessary; they hold a structure together and link different parts of larger structures. Other pieces are optional; the builder can use them creatively. Bininj Kunwok words are assembled from small chunks of meaning that fit together in regular ways. Each small chunk contributes to the meaning of the whole word. Some chunks are necessary; they are required to make a well-formed word, or they link different words in a sentence. Other chunks are optional; the speaker can use them creatively. Nominal words (these refer to *concrete* objects like trees, motor cars or animals; or to *abstract* things like language, qualities, ideas) may contain several chunks of meaning. Verbs (these refer to *states, events, actions, processes, activities*) may contain up to 12 chunks of meaning.

Many Bininj Kunwok words are very long; sometimes it takes a whole English sentence to translate just one Bininj Kunwok word.

This text uses hyphens to break words up into smaller pieces. Hyphens, the dash '—' between chunks of meaning inside a word, are NOT part of the standard spelling system for Bininj Kunwok. But when someone is learning Bininj Kunwok, the hyphens help. They break up long words so learners can recognise the chunks and understand how they fit together. When someone is first

learning to read, they learn to visually process strings of letters. Breaking up long strings of letters into shorter strings helps with visual processing. The hyphens are like trainer wheels on a bicycle: they are there to support beginning learners. We discard them when they are no longer needed.

Glossary:

baleh (Adverb, ignorative and question word) where, what, how. **baleh** ka-yime? 'what is he saying?' or 'how does he do (it)?' **baleh** ka-medj-yime 'what her colours do; how she is coloured'. merlemerle ka-medj-bukkarren **baleh** ka-medj-yime. 'a butterfly reveals how she is coloured'.

-barme (Verb, intransitive) appear as a bright form; gleam; be bright; have high perceived luminescence. ka-**barme** 'she appears as a bright form'. Ngale merlemerle ngal-bami-ken, **ka-barme** ka-re. 'This butterfly is bright, she goes about as a bright form'. Ngale merlemerle kunbodme ngalengarre **ka-barme**. Kun-bodme-karlba,... 'This butterfly's back gleams. The back is yellow-ochred,...' A synonym for *-barme* (a word with a similar meaning) is *-bele* 'pale, white, clean'. The antonym for *-barme* (a word with the opposite meaning) is *-ngurlme* 'appear as a dark form'.

-barmiken (Nominal, describing word) having the quality of high perceived luminescence; be a (source of) light. ngal-**barmiken** 'a *ngal-* class thing that has brightness'. This word stem is derived from the intransitive verb *-barme* 'gleam; appear as a bright form'. **Ngal-barmiken**, ka-barme ka-re. 'she has brightness, she goes about as a bright form'.

-bebbeh- (Prefix on verb stems) each, individually, separately, severally. ka-**bebbeh-**merren 'they get themselves individually, variously, separately, severally' (each one matches something different). Merlemerle ngal-bihbiyika ka-**bebbeh-**marren yiman ka-yime kunworr, la kunwardde, la kundulk kunkurlah. 'Different butterflies individually match the appearance of leaves, or rock, or tree bark' (one butterfly matches leaves; another matches rock; another matches tree bark).

-bele (Nominal, describing word) pale, unsullied, untarnished; clean, clear (water); white. This word carries a prefix that agrees with the thing being described. Classifier words can be incorporated inside the stem of this word: na-**kuk-bele** 'pale-bodied (man)' (a white man). Merlemerle ngal-**kuk-bele** 'a pale-bodied butterfly'. kunronj man-**bo-bele** 'clear water'. Synonyms for *-bele* (words with similar meaning) include *-barme* 'gleam; appear as a bright form'; *-beleme* 'become pale, clean'; *-belewon* 'make (it) pale; make (it) clean'. The antonym for *-bele* (a word with the opposite meaning) is *-bulerri* 'dark, dull, tarnished, dirty, black'.

-berl- (Nominal, classifier) limb; the arm (of a person or creature), wing (of a bird, bat or insect), branch (of a tree), tributary (of a river). This word is a part classifier. It refers to a limb; a long thin part that comes off the sides of a main body. Used to refer to a kind of body part (when the body part word is the head of a nominal expression), it carries the prefix *kun-* or suffix *-no*. **kun-berl** 'an arm'; **berl-no** 'its arm'. The word root can be incorporated into the stems of other words.

-bihbiyika (Nominal, describing word) different-different; various; variously. This word stem carries a prefix that agrees with the thing being described. The word root is *-biyika* 'another; other; different'. The reduplicated ('doubled up') form is pronounced as either *-bihbiyika* or *-biyibiyika* and means either 'very different' or 'many different ones'. Merlemerle **ngal-bihbiyika** ka-bebbe-marren yiman ka-yime kunworr, la kunwardde, la kundulk kunkurlah. 'different butterflies individually match the appearance of leaves, or rocks, or tree bark'. Karri-nan **ngal-medj-biyibiyika** 'We see their various colours'.

-biyibiyika (Nominal, describing word) different-different; various; variously. See *-bihbiyika*.

-bo- (Nominal, classifier) liquid. This word root is a classifier. It refers to all kinds of liquid. It cannot stand on its own; it must be joined to other word parts. It can be incorporated into the stems of other words. man-**bo-bele** 'clean water'. *Kunronj ka-bo-yo* 'water lies, is present; there is water'.

-bodme- (Nominal, classifier) back. This word root is a part classifier. Its scope of meaning includes 'back; high part; ridge or peak (the top of a row of hills); roof (of a house or car); the hump or curve in someone's spine when they are bent over doing an activity (such as sitting and painting)'. This word root cannot stand alone; it must be joined to other word parts. When referring to a back (the word 'back' is head of a nominal expression) it carries the prefix *kun-* or suffix *-no*: **kun-bodme** 'the back'. When talking about part of a larger whole (the whole is the head of a nominal expression)

it can be incorporated into the stems of other words: Kun-**bodme**-karlba, ngal-**bodme**-dadjdadjmiken yiman ka-medj-yime kunyirrkke. 'The back is yellow-ochred, and striped the colour of charcoal'.

-borndidjmiken (Nominal, describing word) 'having contrasts; contrasting'. This word takes a prefix that agrees with the thing being described: ngal-**borndidjmiken** 'a *ngal*- class thing that has contrasts'; ngal-**medj-borndidjmiken** 'a *ngal*- class thing whose colours contrast'. This word stem is made up of: -*borndidj*- 'contrast' + -*mi* (derivational suffix) + -*ken* (Suffix on nominal words) oblique case marker 'concerning, regarding, about, in relation to, in association with; for, of; having'. The word root is -*borndidj*- 'opposing, going back the other way, contrasting'. A Kune speaker defined the meaning of -*borndidj* as 'opposing' and said it can be used to talk about a jagged zig-zag line, "rough line, like big waves up and down". The reduplicated form -*borndidj-borndidj*- means either 'many oppositions' or 'a strong opposition'. Used as a metaphor to describe markings or pattern, -*borndidjmiken* refers to a visual contrast. ngal-medj-**borndidj-borndidjmi-ken** 'her colours contrast strongly'; or 'she has many contrasts in colour'. Here is an example from the Bininj Kunwok dictionary: Werleyh **ka-borndidj-borndidjmi-ken** ka-kuk-barme. 'The Red-shouldered Parrot's body gleams with contrasts'. Ngale merlemerle ngal-wel-dadjdadjmiken **ngal-medj-borndidjmi-ken** yiman ka-yime delek, kunyirrkke; kambe, karlba dorrengh. 'This butterfly's wings have patches of contrasting colours like white clay, charcoal; antbed, yellow ochre as well'.

-borrkke (Verb, intransitive) (it) dances; plays; play-acts: ka-**borrkke** 'she dances'. In this text the word 'dance' is used in a verb chain together with -*welburren* 'flap one's wings': Merlemerle kunberl **ka-wel-burren ka-borrkke** Literally, 'A butterfly flaps her wings she dances'; we translate this as 'a butterfly flutters'.

bu (Conjunction, subordinating) when; if; about, concerning. This conjunction introduces qualifying adjectives, adverbs or phrases. wanjh [**bu** karri-mala-dolkan] karri-nan yiman 'then [when we get up in the morning] we see her like ...' Yiman kunmim ka-mim-di kure kunwel ngalengarre, ka-worhnan [**bu** ka-wel-kolung]. 'Its as if there are eyes on her wings, they open [when her wings go down]'. [**Bu** kundung kabi-wayalhme], ... 'When the sun illuminates her, ...' karri-nan [**bu** ka-wel-waydi], ka-wel-mimihme yiman kunronj. 'we see (that) [when her wings are lit up], they glisten like water'. [**Bu** kun-wel ngalengarre ka-wel-wayhme], karri-nan kanjdji ngal-wel-bulerri. '[When her wings go up], we see underneath (that) her wings are dark'.

-bukkarren (Verb, intransitive) 'show, reveal, display oneself': ka-**bukkarren** 'she displays, shows herself'. Ka-**medj-bukkarren** 'she reveals, displays, shows her colours'. This is the reflexive-reciprocal form of the transitive verb -*bukkan* 'show, display (it); reveal (it), make (it) manifest; teach, demonstrate (it)'. merlemerle **ka-medj-bukkarren** baleh ka-medj-yime. 'a butterfly displays what her colours do (how she is coloured)'.

-bule (Nominal, classifier) ash from a fire. This is dull and grey in colour. This word root is a classifier. It cannot stand on its own; it must be joined to other word parts. Used to refer to a kind of substance, it carries a prefix *kun*- or a suffix -*no*. **kun-bule** 'ash'; kunrak **bule-no** 'the ashes of a fire'. It can be incorporated into the stems of other words: -*bulerri* (literally, 'ashen'); 'dark; dirty, tarnished'. -*bulerran* 'become dark, dirty, tarnished'. ka-medj-marren yiman ka-yime **kunbule**. 'Its colour matches that of ash'.

-bulerri (Nominal, describing word) dull, dark; blackened; sullied, dirty. ngal-**bulerri** 'she is dark'. This word is a compound: -*bule*- (classifier) 'ash' + -*rri* (Verb, intransitive) 'stand; be present'. Although it contains a verb root, this word stem carries nominal agreement prefixes. Ngale merlemerle **ngal-kuk-bulerri**. 'This butterfly is dark in the body' (her body is dark). Ngal-kuk-bulerri yiman ka-yime kunyirrkke. (literally, 'she is dark in the body like charcoal does') 'her body is dark like that of charcoal'. In colloquial English we say: 'she is as black as charcoal'. Ngal-wel-**bulerri**, ka-medj-marren yiman ka-yime kunngol. 'Her wings are dark, their colour is that of clouds.' Synonyms for -*bulerri* (words with a similar meaning) include -*ngurlme* 'appear as a dark form', -*bulerran* 'darken,

become black' and *-bulerriwon* 'tarnish (it); make (it) black, make (it) dirty'. An antonym for *-bulerri* (a word with the opposite meaning) is *-bele* 'pale, white'.

-burren (Verb, intransitive) hit oneself. This is the Reflexive-Reciprocal form of the transitive verb *-bun* 'hit'. To 'hit one's own wings' means 'flap one's wings': Merlemerle kun-berl ka-**wel-burren** 'A butterfly flaps her wings'.

-dadjdadjmiken (Nominal, describing word) 'having the property of being all chopped up'. This word takes a prefix which agrees with the thing that is being described: **ngal-dadjdadjmiken** 'a *ngal*- class thing that has the property of being all chopped up'. This word stem is made up of: *-dadjdadj-* (verb) 'cut-cut' + *-mi* (derivational suffix) + *-ken* (Suffix on nominal words, oblique case marker) 'concerning, regarding, about, in relation to, in association with; for, of; having'. The word root is *-dadj-* 'cut, chop, sever': *-dadjke* 'cut (it)'; *-dadjdadjke* 'cut (it) repeatedly'; *-dadjme* 'be cut'. The reduplicated ('doubled up') stem *-dadjdadjme* means 'be all cut up; have lots of cuts'. Used as a visual metaphor to describe markings or pattern, *-dadjmiken* refers to being visually cut across with a stripe or line. The reduplicated stem *-dadjdadjmiken* refers to having multiple lines cutting across. *-dadjdadjmiken* can mean either 'striped' (orderly parallel lines cutting across) or 'unevenly coloured and patterned; having rough patches of colour' (randomly placed cuts, 'all chopped up'; for example 'army' or 'camouflage' colours). **ngal-bodme-dadjdadjmi-ken** yiman ka-medj-yime kunyirrke. 'her back has stripes the colour of charcoal'. Ngale merlemerle **ngal-wel-dadjdadjmiken** yiman ka-yime delek, kunyirrke; kambe, karlba dorrengh. 'This butterfly's wings are all chopped up with the colours of white clay, charcoal; reddish antbed and yellow ochre as well'.

-darlehmen (Verb, intransitive) (it) dried out; (it) is dessicated, (it) is dead (of plants). ka-worr-**darlehmen** 'the leaves dried out' or 'dried-out (dead) leaves'.

-di (Verb, intransitive) (it) stands, (it) is, (it) is present: ka-**rri** 'it stands'. The word stem changes to *-rri* following a prefix that ends in a vowel, such as **a** or **e**. ka-mim-**di** 'eyes are present; there are eyes'. kunmim ka-mim-**di** kure kunwel ngalengarre 'there are eyes on her wings'. ngal-kuk-bule-**rri**. 'her body is dark (ashen)'.

-dilhdilhmi-ken (Nominal, describing word) 'having dots or spots; spotted'. This word takes a prefix that agrees with the thing being described: **ngal-dilhdilhmi-ken** 'a *ngal*- class thing that has spots'. This word stem is made up of: *-dilhdilh-* 'spots' + *-mi* (derivational suffix) + *-ken* (Suffix on nominal words) oblique case marker 'concerning, regarding, about, in relation to, in association with; for, of; having'. The word root is *-dilh-* 'dot', an interjection which represents the sound or action of making a dot: dilh, dilh, dilh 'dot, dot, dot' (making lots of dots). ngal-wel-**dilhdilh-mi-ken** yiman marnarr 'her wings are spotted like glittering red ochre'. Ngal-wel-**dilhdilh-mi-ken** yiman ka-medj-yime delek. 'Her wings have spots the colour of white clay'. **ngal-dilhdilh-mi-ken** yiman ka-medj-yime kunyirrke. 'She has charcoal-coloured spots'.

-dolkan (Verb, intransitive) jump, jump up (off the ground); rise up, arise; get up (from sitting or lying); take off, set out; fly up: karri-**dolkan** 'we get up'; we set off'. karri-mala-**dolkan** 'we get up in the morning'.

dorrengh (Conjunction) with; together with, also, as well; using. Ngale merlemerle ngal-wel-dadjdadjmiken yiman ka-yime delek, kunyirrke; kambe, karlba **dorrengh**. 'This butterfly's wings are all chopped up with the colours of white clay, charcoal; termitalia and yellow ochre as well'.

ka- (Prefix on verbs) 3rd person singular subject 'he, she, it'. This indexes the subject of an intransitive verb and the subject of a transitive verb when the object is also 3rd person singular. In Bininj Kunwok the names of many things do not trigger non-singular number agreement; the grammar treats them as mass nouns (like English *hair*, *sand*, *fish*). Non-singular number agreement usually applies only to higher animate beings such as people and spirits. The names of small creatures like butterflies, trees or inanimate things like rocks normally get treated as mass nouns: they are indexed as singular in number even when we are talking about more than one. However there are other ways, outside the agreement system, to indicate plural number. Word roots are reduplicated or number words are incorporated. *ngal-dilhdilhmi-ken* 'a *ngal*- class thing with spots';

here, reduplication of *-dilh-* 'spot' lets us know that there are many spots. In the following sentence *merlemerle* 'butterfly' is indexed as 3rd person singular subject on the verbs, but the incorporated number word *-kaberrk-* 'together' lets us know that there are many individual butterflies:

merlemerle ka-kaberrk-di ka-wel-burren ka-borrkke ka-re 'butterflies flutter about together'.

-kaberrk- (Prefix on verbs) together: *ka-kaberrk-di* 'they are together'; 'they are present together'. *Merlemerle ka-kaberrk-di ka-wel-burren ka-borrkke ka-re* 'butterflies flutter about together'.

kabi- (Prefix on verbs) 3rd person singular subject acting on a 3rd person singular object; 'it acting on it'. *kabi-wayalhme* '(it) illuminates (it)'. This prefix is normally used only when the object is higher in animacy than the subject, or when the speaker is focusing specifically on the object. In the following example the object (this butterfly) is higher in animacy than the subject (the sun). Across several sentences in the whole paragraph the speaker is focusing on and talking about the butterfly: *Ngale merlemerle ... kundung kabi-wayalhme* 'This butterfly ... the sun illuminates her'. Here, in the English translation we could use passive voice: 'this butterfly ... she *is illuminated by* the sun'. In another description, the speaker left out any reference to the source of light and said: *ngale merlemerle ... kunwel ngalengarre ka-wel-wayhme* 'this butterfly ... her wings *are illuminated*'. In this example the verb carries a 3rd person singular prefix that indexes only the object argument.

kaddum (Adverb, location) above; higher up, upstream; on top of; up high. *Ka-wel-kolung, wanjh karri-nan kaddum ka-medj-marren yiman ka-yime kunngol.* 'She lowers her wings, then we see that on top their colour matches that of cloud (the upper side of her wings is blue)'.

-kadjurren (Verb, intransitive) follow, pursue one another. This is the reflexive-reciprocal form of transitive verb *-kadjung* 'follow, pursue (it)'. Used metaphorically, *-kadjurren* means 'copy' one another, or 'share' behaviours, or have 'common' attributes. People or animals act in the same way as one another. They follow one another in behaviour, fashion or custom; or they share country with one another. In this text, a butterfly and a leaf, or a butterfly and a rock, or a butterfly and the bark of a tree, are described metaphorically as 'following' one another in their appearance. They 'copy' or 'share' one another's colours and markings. *Merlemerle ngal-bihbiyika ka-bebbeh-marren yiman ka-yime kunworr, la kunwardde, la kundulk kunkurlah. Ka-kadjurren rowk.* 'Different butterflies individually match the appearance of leaves, or rock, or tree bark.' (One butterfly's appearance matches that of leaves; another butterfly's appearance matches that of rock; another butterfly's appearance matches that of tree bark). They follow one another completely'.

kambe (Noun) antbed; termitalia. This is the generic name for 'antbed'; typically a red-brown cathedral termite mound. The colour of antbed varies with the soil. It can be reddish-brown, pale grey-brown, black, or reddish-brown. Although it is sometimes pale, it is always dull (it has relatively low perceived luminescence).

kanjdji (Adverb, location) below; lower down, downstream; underneath; inside. *Bu kunwel ngalengarre ka-wel-wayhme, karri-nan kanjdji ngal-wel-bulerri.* 'When her wings go up, we see that underneath they are black (the underside of her wings is black)'.

karlba (Noun) yellow ochre. This is yellow, yellow-brown or tan in colour and is used as a pigment in painting.

karri- (Prefix on verbs) 1st person inclusive plural subject 'we (including you)'. This indexes the subject of an intransitive verb and the subject of a transitive verb when the object is 3rd person singular. *Karri-nan* 'we (including you) see it'.

-karrkarr (Nominal, describing word) see-through, transparent, clear. *Ngale merlemerle ngal-wel-karrkarr* 'this butterfly's wings are transparent'.

-kolung (Verb, intransitive) (it) goes down; descends: *ka-kolung* 'it goes down'. *Ka-wel-kolung* 'its wings go down'. *Merlemerle ka-wel-wayhme, ka-wel-kolung ka-ni.* 'A butterfly sits, her wings going up and down'.

-kuk- (Nominal, classifier) body; form, shape; the substance or 'stuff' of a body. This word is a part classifier. It cannot stand alone; it must be joined to other word parts. Used to refer to a body, it carries a *kun-* class prefix: **kun-kuk** 'a body'. It can be incorporated into the stems of other words: Ngale merlemerle ngal-**kuk**-bele. (literally, 'This butterfly is pale in the body; this butterfly's body is pale') 'she is pale-bodied'. Ngale merlemerle ngal-**kuk**-bulerri. (Literally, 'This butterfly is dark in the body; this butterfly's body is dark') 'she is dark-bodied'.

ku-kak (Noun) at night. This word is made up of local case prefix *ku-* 'in, at, on' and classifier word root *-kak-* 'darkness; night'. *ku-kak ka-ngurlme ka-re*. 'at night she goes about as a dark form'. **Ku-kak** *ku-kurk ka-rerrkan ka-yo* 'at night she settles on the ground to sleep'.

ku-kurk (Noun) on the ground. This word is made up of local case prefix *ku-* 'in, at, on' and classifier word root *-kurk-* 'ground; soil, earth'. *Ku-kak ku-kurk ka-rerrkan ka-yo* 'at night she settles on the ground to sleep'.

kumekke (Demonstrative, *kun-* class) that; there, that place; then, at that time; that (place, time) we both know about; I have just now told you about it. **Kumekke** *ka-warlkkarren*. 'There she hides'; 'That is where she hides'.

kunbodme (Noun) back. See *-bodme-*.

kun-bodme-karlba (Nominal, describing word) 'yellow-ochred-back'; a back the colour of yellow ochre. Ngale merlemerle *kun-bodme ngalengarre ka-barme*. **Kun-bodme-karlba**, ... 'This butterfly's back is bright. The back is yellow-ochred, ...' See *-medj-delek*.

kunbule (Noun) ash. See *-bule-*.

kundulk kunkurlah (Nominal expression) tree bark; the bark of trees. *kundulk* 'tree'; *kunkurlah* 'bark'.

kunekke (Demonstrative, *kun-* class) thus; that; that one we both know about; exactly that thing I mentioned just now. This is used in logical inferences. **Kunekke** *ka-medj-bukkarren baleh ka-medj-yime*. 'Thus (referring to what I'm talking about) she displays how she is coloured.' Also *kunek-beh* 'from that; from there': *Yiman ngurri-yime kunih mayali medjno-ken minj ngarri-karrme larrk*. **Kunek-beh** *ngadberre ngarri-yeme kunwok-ken*. 'You seem to think that we have no colour concepts. That could make us feel embarrassed about our language.'

kunmarlaworr (Noun) foliage; leafy growth; leaves. This word is made up of a prefix *kun-* bound to a word stem *-malaworr*. The word root *-worr-* is a classifier that refers to any kind of leaf. Ngale merlemerle *ka-medj-marren yiman ka-yime kunmalaworr*. 'This butterfly is the colour of leaves' (green). Another colour metaphor for 'green' is *manbak*. This word is made up of a prefix, *man-* bound to a classifier root *-bak-*. *-bak-* is a generic name for plants and algae that grow in water. Coastal and subcoastal people sometimes use the name for water plants to refer to the colour green. Coastal salt pans and shallow billabongs, where algae and water plants grow during the wet season, dry out during the dry season. The dried algae and water plants form a layer on the surface of the mud. Salt pans and low-lying blacksoil areas dry out to a grey-green colour.

kunmim (Noun) eye; eyes. See *-mim-*.

kunngol (Noun) cloud, sky. This word is made up of a prefix *kun-* and word root *-ngol-* 'sky, cloud'. *-ngol-* is a classifier and cannot stand on its own; it must be joined to other word parts. **Kun-ngol** 'cloud; sky'. It is often incorporated into the stems of other words. Here is an example from the Bininj Kunwok dictionary: *Nakohbanj nang ngol-baruy kun-ngol-burlerri bu kodjngol-wernminj, wanjh yimeng "Kunubewu mandjewk ka-djakdung"*. 'The old man saw the clouds streaked and black and filling the sky, then said "It might rain".' This word is used to refer to the colour blue. *Ka-medj-marren yiman ka-yime kunngol*. 'her colour matches that of a cloud' (it's blue). *ngal-medj-kunngol* 'she is cloud-coloured' (blue).

kunwardde (Noun) rock. This word is made up of a prefix *kun-* and classifier *-wardde* 'rock'.

kunwel (Noun) wing, wings. See *-wel-* and *-berl-*.

kunworr (Noun) leaf, leaves. See *-worr-*.

kunyirrke (Noun) charcoal, black in colour, used as a pigment in painting. Some Kuninjku speakers say: *kundjarri* 'charcoal'. Some artists use another word for black pigment: *kunmabu* 'black ochre'. Black ochre is a kind of rock, but an artist might use this word to refer to any kind of black pigment, including charcoal.

kure (Preposition, Location word) to, at, on, there. *kunmim ka-mim-di kure kunwel ngalengarre* 'there are eyes on her wings'.

la (Conjunction) and; or; but. In the following example the conjunction *la* works together with the distributive verb prefix *-bebbeh-* 'each' to offer mutually exclusive alternatives. It is translated using English *or*: *Merlemerle ngal-bihbiyika ka-bebbeh-marren yiman ka-yime kunworr, la kunwardde, la kundulk kunkurlah*. 'various butterflies individually match the appearance of leaves, or rock, or tree bark' (one butterfly matches leaves; another matches rock; another matches tree bark).

-layirmiken (Nominal, describing word) 'having a line; lined'. This word takes a prefix which agrees with the thing that is being described: *ngal-layirmiken* 'a *ngal-* class thing that has a line'. This word stem is made up of: *-layirr-* 'line' + *-mi* (derivational suffix) + *-ken* (Suffix on nominal words, oblique case marker) 'concerning, regarding, about, in relation to, in association with; for, of; having'. The word root is *-layirr-* 'line; stripe'; *-lahlayirr* (reduplicated form) 'repeated lines; stripes'. *Ngal-wel-layirr-mi-ken* 'her wings are lined'. *ngal-layirr-mi-ken yiman ka-medj-yime kunyirrke* 'she has lines the colour of charcoal'.

-mala- (Prefix on verbs, time adverb) early morning; next morning. *karri-mala-dolkan* 'we get up in the morning'.

-marlbmarlbme (Verb, intransitive) flash-flash, blink-blink; blink on and off repeatedly; twinkle, sparkle: *ka-marlbmarlbme* 'it flashes'. This is a reduplicated ('doubled up') form of the verb *-marlbme* 'blink on and off again'. This refers to the behaviour of light, intermittently emitted by or reflected from a body. Many things emit light intermittently: fireflies; stars; rippling water; bioluminescent algae and tiny creatures in the sea; the indicator lights of a motor vehicle; the landing lights of an aeroplane. *Karri-nan yiman ka-wel-marlbmarlbme ka-re*. 'We see her like her wings flash-flash as she goes along' (her wings look like they're flashing on and off). Two different words with similar meaning are *-marduhme* and *-mayhke*. *ka-marduhme* 'it flashes; it sends out a sudden, very brief but intensive ray of light' (lightning does this, sending out bolts of light; or a fish does this when its body turns and its scales catch the sun, briefly reflecting a beam of sunlight.). *ka-mayhke* '(he) causes a bolt of lightning' (Namarrkon, the lightning ancestor does this by clashing his stone axes together).

marnarr (Noun) glittering red ochre. This is red in colour and has a 'glitter' effect when used as a pigment in body painting. It is much brighter than *yamidj* 'red ochre', which is a dull red-brown.

-marren 1. (Verb, intransitive) (it) gets itself; (they) get one another; (they) meet up with one another. *bene-marren* 'they two meet one another'. This is the reflexive-reciprocal form of the transitive verb *-mang* 'get, obtain; gather, catch, grasp; attain or arrive at (a new location, physical configuration or state of being). In its reciprocal sense the verb stem *-marren* is used to talk about two or more things getting, joining or meeting up with one another. The things that meet up are indexed as subject. A complement refers to a new location or configuration. Here is an example from the Bininj Kunwok dictionary: *kunronj ka-bal-bo-re kore ka-berl-marren man-bo-kimuk*. 'water flows away to where **tributaries meet one another** as a large body of water'.

-marren 2. (Verb, intransitive) (it) gets itself; (it) gets (to be something). In its reflexive sense the verb stem *-marren* is used to talk about attaining an attribute (such as a state, a height, a volume, a colour). For example we 'get' old (we attain a new state); or a growing child 'gets to' 1.3 metres (she attains a new height); or a collection of harvested fruit 'gets to' the top of a collecting basket (it attains a new volume and configuration). The thing that 'gets itself' or 'attains' is indexed

as subject. A complement (typically an incorporated nominal) refers to the new attribute. Kun-wern wungmeng **bulkkidj-marrinj**. 'He smoked a lot and **got** (himself) **ill**'.

-marren 3. (Verb, intransitive) (it) is analogous (to something); (it) matches (something) (in some way). In Bininj Kunwok, the word *-marren* is also used to make analogies. When Kuninjku speakers use the expression **ka-marren yiman** ... 'it gets itself like ...' they are introducing an analogy. An analogy explains a concept by using a parallel description of something that is unrelated. The thing that we want to explain is indexed as subject. A complement (typically an incorporated classifier) names the relevant attribute. A second complement, introduced by the word *yiman* 'like', provides the analogy. This text contains many colour analogies. Ngale merlemerle **ka-medj-marren yiman** ka-yime delek. (Literally, 'this butterfly's colour gets itself as white clay does') 'this butterfly's colour matches that of white clay' (she is the colour of white clay). **ka-medj-marren yiman** ka-yime kunyirrke. (Literally, 'her colour gets itself as charcoal does') 'her colour matches that of charcoal' (she is the colour of charcoal). Ngale-wel-bulerri, **ka-medj-marren yiman** ka-yime kunngol. 'Her wings are dark, their colour matches that of clouds (her wings are blue).' Ngale merlemerle ngal-kuk-bele, **ka-medj-marren yiman** ka-yime kunmalaworr. (literally, 'this butterfly's body is bright, her colour gets itself as a leaf does') 'This butterfly's body is bright, her colour matches that of a leaf' (she is the colour of leaves). Ngale merlemerle ngal-kuk-bulerri, **ka-medj-marren yiman** ka-yime kundulk kodno. (literally, 'This butterfly's body is dull, her colour gets itself as tree bark does') 'This butterfly's body is dull, her colour matches that of tree bark' (she is the colour of tree bark).

-medj- (Noun, classifier) colours and pattern (both design or natural markings). This word is a classifier. It refers to 'marks' or a 'pattern' of brightly contrasting colours. In traditional painting a dull, dark base colour, usually red ochre, is first applied across the entire surface; on top of this the artist paints a design. The pigments used in the design contrast with the base colour and with one another. A design or pattern of multiple contrasting colours is called *-medj-*. It can be translated as 'contrasting colours' or 'pattern'; in this text we translate it simply as 'colours'. This word root cannot stand alone; it must be joined to other word parts. In this text, it is always incorporated into the stems of other words. merlemerle **ka-medj-bukkarren** baleh **ka-medj-yime**. 'a butterfly reveals how she is coloured'. ngal-dilhdihmiken yiman **ka-medj-yime** kunyirrke. (literally, 'she is spotted like charcoal does its colour') 'she has charcoal-coloured spots'.

-medj-delek (Nominal, describing word) white-clay-coloured; white clay in colour. ngal-**medj-delek** 'a *ngal-* class thing that is white clay in colour'. This word stem is a compound: *-medj-* (classifier) 'colour' + *-delek* (noun) 'white clay'. The compound stem carries a prefix that agrees with the thing being described. Kuninjku speakers use this type of compound to use a Noun (the name of a thing) as a describing word. The compound has two parts: the name of a part plus the name of a thing that provides an example of an attribute. Ngale merlemerle **ngal-medj-delek**. 'This butterfly's colour is white clay'; 'this butterfly is white-clay-coloured'. This type of description is a way of speaking metaphorically. A metaphor describes one thing in terms of another; an object that is well known for a particular attribute is used as an example to describe another object. Here are some examples from the Bininj Kunwok dictionary. *ngal-kodj-ngalng*: *-kodj-* (part classifier) 'head' + *ngalng* (noun) 'yabby'; 'yabby-head'. Speakers don't mean literally that someone has a yabby for a head; they mean that someone's head looks like a yabby (it's very ugly). (This is one way that young men refer to their sisters, with whom they have an avoidance relationship.) *ngal-wel-yamidj* 'her wings are red-ochre'; she is red-ochre in the wings'. Speakers don't mean literally that her wings are made of red ochre; they mean that her wings *look like* red ochre (they are reddish brown in colour). *ngal-kuk-kurlba*: *-kuk-* (part classifier) 'body' + *kurlba* (noun) 'blood'; 'blood-bodied'. Speakers don't mean literally that someone's body is constituted of blood; they mean either that someone is bloody, their body is covered in blood; or that their body looks like blood (it's red in colour). *ngal-kuk-karlba*: *-kuk-* (classifier) 'body' + *karlba* (Noun) 'yellow ochre'; 'yellow-ochre-bodied'. Speakers don't mean literally that someone's body is constituted of yellow ochre; they mean either that their body is covered in yellow ochre, or that their body looks like yellow ochre (it's yellow or tan in colour). *kun-bodme-*

karlba 'yellow-ochre-back'; a back the colour of yellow ochre. This text has several compound words that use the name of a thing as a metaphor to describe the colour of butterflies.

-medj-karlba (Nominal, describing word) yellow-ochre-coloured (yellow or tan in colour). ngal-**medj-karlba** 'a ngal- class thing yellow ochre in colour'. ngale merlemerle ngal-**medj-karlba** 'this butterfly is yellow ochre in colour'; yellow-coloured (yellow-tan).

-medj-kunbule (Nominal, describing word) ash in colour; ash-coloured (dull and grey).

-medj-kunngol (Nominal, describing word) cloud in colour; cloud-coloured (blue).

-medj-kunworr (Nominal, describing word) leaf in colour; leaf-coloured (green).

-medj-kunyirrke (Nominal, describing word) charcoal in colour; charcoal-coloured (black).

-medj-yamidj (Nominal, describing word) red-ochre-coloured (dull red or reddish brown).

merlemerle (Noun) butterfly, moth; all members of the scientific order *Lepidoptera*. In this text, it is translated simply as 'butterfly'. In Bininj mythology, all butterflies are Female. The word *merlemerle* 'butterfly' governs Feminine agreement on other words.

-mim- (Nominal, classifier) eye, eyeball shape. This word root is a part classifier. It refers to an eye, eyeball, seed; any small spherical or round object that is part of a larger body. It can refer to the seeds of a plant, the headlights of a car, or the breathing hole of a longnecked turtle (during the dry season when billabongs dry out, turtles bury themselves in the mud, with a small round breathing hole their only exposure to the hot air). This word root cannot stand alone; it must be joined to other word parts. When we are talking about an eye (when 'eye' is the head of a nominal expression), it carries a prefix *kun-* or an oblique pronoun suffix: **kun-mim** 'eye, eyes'. It can be incorporated into the stems of other words: **ka-mim-di** 'its eyes are present; it has eyes; there are eyes'. Yiman **kunmim ka-mim-di kure kunwel ngalengarre, ka-worhnan bu ka-wel-kolung**. 'It's like there are eyes on her wings, they open when her wings go down'.

-mimihme (Verb, intransitive) (it) glistens: **ka-mimihme** 'it glistens'. Ngale merlemerle **ka-wel-mimihme** yiman kunronj. 'This butterfly's wings glisten like water'.

-nan (Verb, transitive) see (it): karri-**nan** 'we see it'.

ngal- (Prefix, noun class agreement) 3rd person singular Feminine (*ngal*-class) agreement marker on nominal words. **merlemerle ngal-bele** 'a pale butterfly'.

ngale (Pronoun, Demonstrative, *ngal*- class) this, this one here (we're looking at it, I'm starting to talk about it). **Ngale** merlemerle ... 'this butterfly...'

ngalengarre (Pronoun, oblique) 3rd person singular Feminine (*ngal*- class) 'hers; of, for her'. This word is a compound: *ngaleng* (3rd person singular Feminine pronoun) 'she, her' + *-ngarre* (oblique pronoun suffix) 'of, for'. kunbodme **ngalengarre** 'her back'.

-ngurlme (Verb, intransitive) appear as a dark form; be dull; absorb light; have low perceived luminescence. Ngale merlemerle **ka-ngurlme ka-re**. 'This butterfly goes about as a dark form'. A synonym for *-ngurlme* (a word with a similar meaning) is *-bulerri* 'be dark, black'. The antonym for *-ngurlme* (a word with the opposite meaning) is *-barne* 'gleam; appear as a bright form'.

-ni (Verb, intransitive) (it) sits, is, stays (for a while): **ka-ni** 'it sits'. Used as an auxiliary verb in a verb chain, the word 'sit' adds the aspectual meaning **sit** or **stay xxx-ing**; 'sit or stay doing something'. Merlemerle **ka-wel-wayhme, ka-wel-kolung ka-ni**. 'A butterfly sits raising and lowering her wings'.

-rawohraworren (Verb, intransitive) come together as many individuals; gather in a big group; assemble: kabirri-**rawohraworren** 'they gather together in a big group'. The word root is *-rawon* 'group (individual things) together; add (them) together; assemble (individual things)'. The reduplicated form is *-rawohrawon* 'do a lot of adding'; 'add repeatedly'; 'add or put together a lot of things'. The reflexive-reciprocal form is *-raworren* 'come together, assemble as a collection or group': Karri-**raworren** karri-wern karri-re. 'Let's get together as a big group and all of us go.' The word stem *-rawohraworren* is both reduplicated and reflexive; many individual things assemble or group

themselves together. *-medj-raworren* 'many individual colours group themselves together'. Ngale merlemerle **ka-medj-rawohraworren** (Literally, 'this butterfly's colours group themselves together') 'this butterfly has an assembly of individual colours; she is multi-coloured'.

-re (Verb, intransitive) (it) goes: **ka-re** 'he, she, it goes'. Merlemerle **ka-re** 'a butterfly goes'. Used as an auxiliary verb in a verb chain, the word 'go' adds the aspectual meaning **go along xxx-ing**; 'go along doing something'. Merlemerle **kunberl ka-wel-burren ka-borrkke ka-re** 'a butterfly goes along fluttering; she flutters about'. **ka-barme ka-re** 'she goes about as a bright form'.

-rerrkan (Verb, intransitive) sit down, set oneself down, settle; alight (as a bird alights on a perch): merlemerle **ka-rerrkan** 'a butterfly alights'.

rowk (Particle, adverbial post position) everything, all, everyone; wholly, completely. **Ka-kadjurren rowk**. 'they follow another completely'.

walakkih (Adverb, qualifier) a little; a small amount; somewhat; quite. Ngale merlemerle **walakkih** *ngal-kuk-bele*. 'This butterfly's body is quite bright'. Ngale merlemerle **walakkih** *ngal-kuk-bulerrri*. 'This butterfly's body is quite dark'.

wanjh (Conjunction) then; after that; next. Merlemerle **kun-berl ka-wel-burren ka-borrkke ka-re, wanjh ka-rerrkan**. 'A butterfly flutters about, then she settles'. We can also sometimes translate *wanjh* as 'so'; it comes at the conclusion to an explanation and indicates that the concluding statement follows logically from the information that has just been given. This example follows two sentences describing differential colour on undersides and tops of the wings: ... **Karri-nan wanjh yiman ka-wel-marlbmarlbme ka-re**. ... 'So we see her like her wings flash-flash as she goes along'.

-warlkkarren (Verb, intransitive) hide; hide oneself; hide one another. This is the reflexive-reciprocal form of transitive verb *-warlkan* 'hide (it); put (it) where (it) can't be seen'. **Kumekke ka-warlkkarren**. 'there she hides herself'.

-wayalhme (Verb, transitive) illuminates (it), lights (it) up, shines on (it): **kundung kabi-wayalhme** 'the sun illuminates it'.

-waydi (Verb, intransitive) (it) shines: **ka-waydi** 'it shines'. Ngale merlemerle **ka-wel-waydi** 'this butterfly's wings shine'.

-wayhme (Verb, intransitive) (it) goes up; rises, ascends: **Ka-wayhme** 'it rises'. **Ka-wel-wayhme** 'its wings rise'. Merlemerle **ka-wel-wayhme, ka-wel-kolung ka-ni**. 'A butterfly sits, her wings going up and down'.

-wel- (Nominal, classifier) wing (of a bird, butterfly, dragonfly, aeroplane). This word is a part classifier. It refers to the wing of a bird, butterfly, dragonfly, bat or aeroplane. It is used interchangeably with another classifier, *-berl-* 'arm'. Used to refer to a kind of body part (when the body part word is the head of a nominal expression), it carries the prefix *kun-* or is followed by an oblique pronoun. **kunwel ngalengarre** 'her wings'. **Kunwel ngalengarre ka-medj-marren yiman kayime yamidj**. 'Her wings match red ochre in colour'. It can be incorporated into the stems of other words. Merlemerle **kun-berl ka-wel-burren** 'A butterfly flaps her wings'.

-worhnan (Verb, intransitive) eyes wide open; be awake, conscious; be watchful, observant; oversee, be responsible or in charge; be sighted (not blind). **Kunmim ngalengarre ka-worhnan** either 'her eyes open' or 'she is watchful'. **Yiman kunmim ka-mim-di kure kunwel ngalengarre, ka-worhnan bu ka-wel-kolung**. 'It's like there are eyes on her wings, they open when her wings go down'.

-worr- (Nominal, classifier) leaf, leaves. This word root is a classifier and refers to any kind of leaf. It cannot stand on its own; it must be joined to other word parts. Used as a noun (the head of a nominal expression) it carries the prefix *kun-*: **kun-worr** 'leaf, leaves'. It can be incorporated into the stems of other words: **man-worr-darleh** 'dried leaves'. **ka-worr-darlehmen** 'leaves have dried out'; 'dried-out leaves; dead leaves'.

yamidj (Noun) red ochre, dull reddish-brown in colour, used as a pigment in painting.

yiman 1. (Modal particle) like; as (if), as (though). Used as a modal particle, *yiman* introduces a statement that is not meant to be understood literally: **Yiman** kunmim ka-mim-di kure kunwel ngalengarre 'It's like there are eyes on her wings'; 'it's as if there are eyes on her wings.' (It seems like she has eyes on her wings, but not really.). Speakers also use *yiman* to introduce examples. In this context we translate it as 'like', 'such as'; 'for example'. Karri-nan wanjh ngal-medj-biyibiyika, **yiman**: ngal-kuk-bele, ngal-kuk-bulerri, ngal-medj-delek, ngal-medj-karlba, ngal-medj-yamidj, ngal-medj-marnarr'So we see their various colours, such as: bright-bodied, dark-bodied, white-clay-coloured, yellow-ochre-coloured, red-ochre-coloured, glitter-ochre-coloured

yiman 2. (Modal particle) like; similar to, similarly. The word *yiman* is used to introduce comparisons. When we compare two things, we assert that they have something in common. This example comes from the Bininj Kunwok dictionary: Nawu lambalk nakka **yiman** djebuyh; kabene-kuk-rohrok, kore kundulk kabene-yo manbu man-dulk-rurrrk. 'A sugar glider is like a possum; they have the same form, they both live in trees that are hollow'. Kuninjku speakers also use the word *yiman* to make similes. A simile describes one thing by comparing it with another. Ngale merlemerle ngal-wel-karrkarr **yiman** man-bo-bele. 'This butterfly's wings are transparent like clean water'. ka-wel-mimihme **yiman** kunronj 'her wings glisten like water'. Ngal-kuk-bulerri **yiman** ka-yime kunyirrke. (literally, 'She is dark-bodied like charcoal does') The equivalent English expression is 'she is *as black as* charcoal'. Ngale merlemerle ngal-kuk-bele **yiman** ka-yime delek. (Literally, 'This butterfly is pale-bodied like white clay does.') The equivalent English expression is 'she is *as white as* white clay'. ngaldilhilmikien yiman ka-medj-yime kunyirrke. (Literally, 'she is spotted like charcoal's colour does'; her spots are as though they were charcoal markings') 'she has charcoal-coloured spots'. Ngal-wel-dilhilmikien **yiman** ka-medj-yime delek. (Literally, 'Her wings are spotted like white clay's colour does it'; 'her spots are as though they were white clay markings') 'she has white-clay-coloured spots'. Karri-nan **yiman** ka-yime ka-worr-darlehmen (Literally, 'we see her like a dried-out leaf does') 'we see her as we see a dried-out leaf'. Speakers don't mean literally that she is a dried-out leaf; they mean that her appearance (what we see) is similar to the appearance of a dried-out leaf. The equivalent simile in English language is 'she *looks like* a dried-out leaf'. Karri-nan **yiman** ka-wel-marlbmarlbme ka-re. 'we see her as though her wings flash as she goes'. Speakers don't mean literally that this butterfly's wings are blinking lights; they mean that her appearance (what we see) as she goes along is comparable to the appearance of a blinking light. She *looks like* she's flashing.

-yime 1. (Verb, intransitive) do (an action), say (a quote). The one who does or says something is indexed as subject. A complement refers to what is done or said.

-yime 2. (Verb, intransitive). Kuninjku speakers also use the verb *-yime* 'do' to talk about attributes, including colour. In English language we use the verb *be* to talk about attributes; we say 'she *is* coloured'; 'her colour *is*...'; 'she *is* (red, yellow, blue)'. Kuninjku language has no verb that means the same as English *be*. Instead, to talk about attributes (including colour) Kuninjku speakers use the verb *-yime* 'do'. They say 'she *does* her colour'. **ka-medj-yime** Literally, 'it does its colour; its colour does'. We translate this as 'its colour *is*'. Ngal-kuk-bulerri yiman **ka-yime** kunyirrke. (literally, 'She is dark-bodied as charcoal does'; 'she is dark-bodied like charcoal is') She is *as black as* charcoal. **baleh ka-medj-yime** (Literally, 'what *she* does in her colour' or 'what *her* colours do'.) In English, 'how she *is* coloured'. Merlemerle ka-medj-bukkarren **baleh ka-medj-yime**. (literally, 'A butterfly displays her colours what her colours do'). In English, 'a butterfly displays *how she is* coloured'.

-yo (Verb, intransitive) be, be present; lie; sleep. Ku-kak ku-kurllk ka-rerrkan **ka-yo** 'at night she settles on the ground to sleep'.

