

# Laws of in-law languages

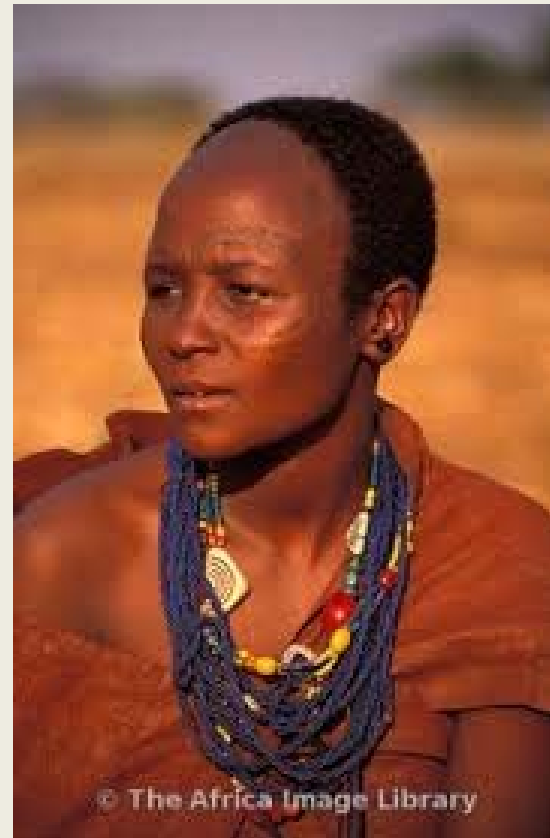
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# 1 Intro Names and respect

- naming parents / in-laws
- name avoidance



# 1.1 Register of respect

Datooga bride avoids name of father-in-law +  
But also the word it is based on  
And any other form of the word  
And any similar word

For example: avoid Gida-bung'eeda,  
also Uda-bung'eeda,  
+ bung'eeda 'funeral' + plural form  
+ any word that begins in bu-

Conventionalised

## 1.2 Where?

Southern Africa: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho

Eastern Africa: Nyakyusa, Datooga; Lokele

Horn of Africa: Sidamo and other Highland East Cushitic, Oromo

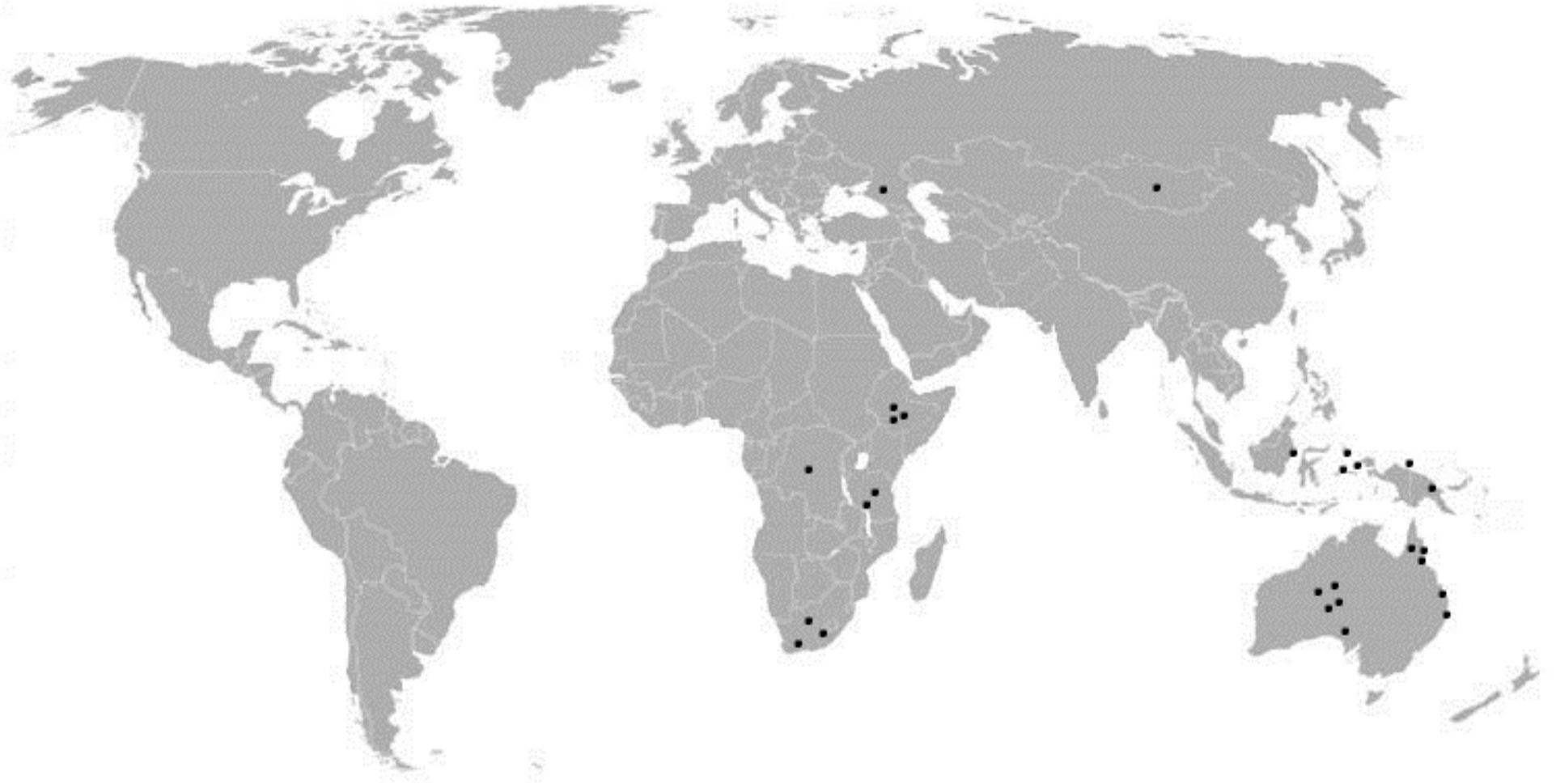
Australia: Pama-Nyungan: Dyirbal, Guugu-Yimidhirr, Gurindji, MaNarayi, Umpila, Uw-Oykangand, Warlpiri, Yankunytjatjara, Yidiny. Bunaban: Bunaba, Gooniyandi

S.E. Asia: Harurai; Galela, Tobelo, Mota, Korowai, Buru  
Mongolia

Tibeto-Burman: Dhimal

Caucasus: only remnants

# Map of in-law languages



## 1.3 Why compare?

- scholarship for the most part taking literature on the same region into account
- linguistic and anthropological literature separate
- global comparison leads to new questions
- and to a beginning of “laws of in-law languages”
- which is important in recognising vestiges

## 2 Conceptual dimensions

1. demarcation of the phenomenon
2. recognition of the phenomenon in indigenous labels
3. essentials of names

## 2.1 Range of phenomena

- name taboo/respect father-in-law  
(only name and its variants: Fulfulde)
- name taboo/respect mother-in-law
- name taboo/respect king, higher class
- avoid the name of a deceased important person
- extensive honorifics
- taboo
- name avoidance



## 2.2 Label for phenomenon

- Nearly all in-law languages have a specific name, label in the relevant language.
- Exceptions are Guugu-Yimidhirr, Djaru (Australia).
- The labels are related to the concepts “in-law” or to “respect”.

## 2.3 Names

- Different names: which one to avoid (those most related to kin)
- Motivated names
- Name and identity, ownership, its power
- Indexical and referential use; attracting attention (>+similar)
- Name giving ritual re-enactment

## 3 Social aspects

1. Structure of society
2. Gendered language?
3. Anchored in world view
4. Speech community
5. Acquisition; imposition

## 3.1 Structure of society

- Sign of hierarchical society? (cf. speak to the king, honorifics). Does not hold: also in egalitarian HG societies. King's register separate additional phenomenon.
- Kinship system: no clear link FiL/MiL and patri/matrilineal; e.g. Korowai MiL-SiL but virilocal and male dominant. Marriage and across sex; stranger.
- Dimension: symmetry in respect or not.

## 3.2 Gendered language?

Often characterised as female speech.

but

- sometimes extends to males
- linguistic features not associated with gender in these societies as it is in real female speech
- males have passive knowledge FiL and may use it as “secret” language
- males practice MiL-language

## 3.3 Anchored in world view

- Women use it no longer when there is offspring for the clan, when they have become part of elders,
- words as penetrating skin, hurting
- words to be fed; other links to food (e.g. don't eat chicken from FiL's compound); spit after mistake
- [avoid view, not speech]

## 3.4 Speech community

- Registers of respect wider than language boundaries
- Registers of respect differ in subareas of speech community
- Speech community differs in different registers of the same language

## 3.5 Imposition

- Explicit teaching
- “Punishment” for mistakes: misfortune



# 4 Linguistic dimensions

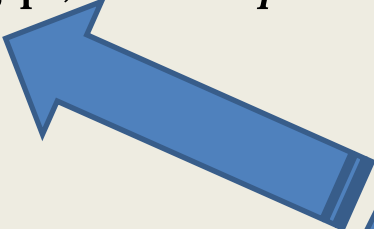
1. what to avoid?
2. how to avoid?
3. distribution of manipulations
4. semantics
5. form manipulations
6. grammar affected?
7. usage

# 4.1 What to avoid and how

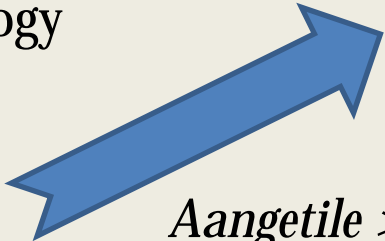
same replacement  
for related set of  
forms

derivati  
on  
in degrees: sg/pl; "all": *seiponi*: folk morphology

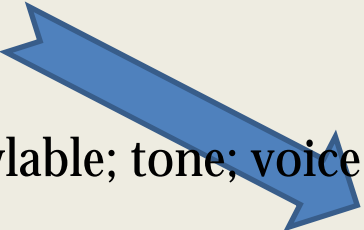
conjug  
ations



name  
+  
word



*Aangetile* > *ket-*



Folk phonology: 1st syllable; tone; voice; prenasals

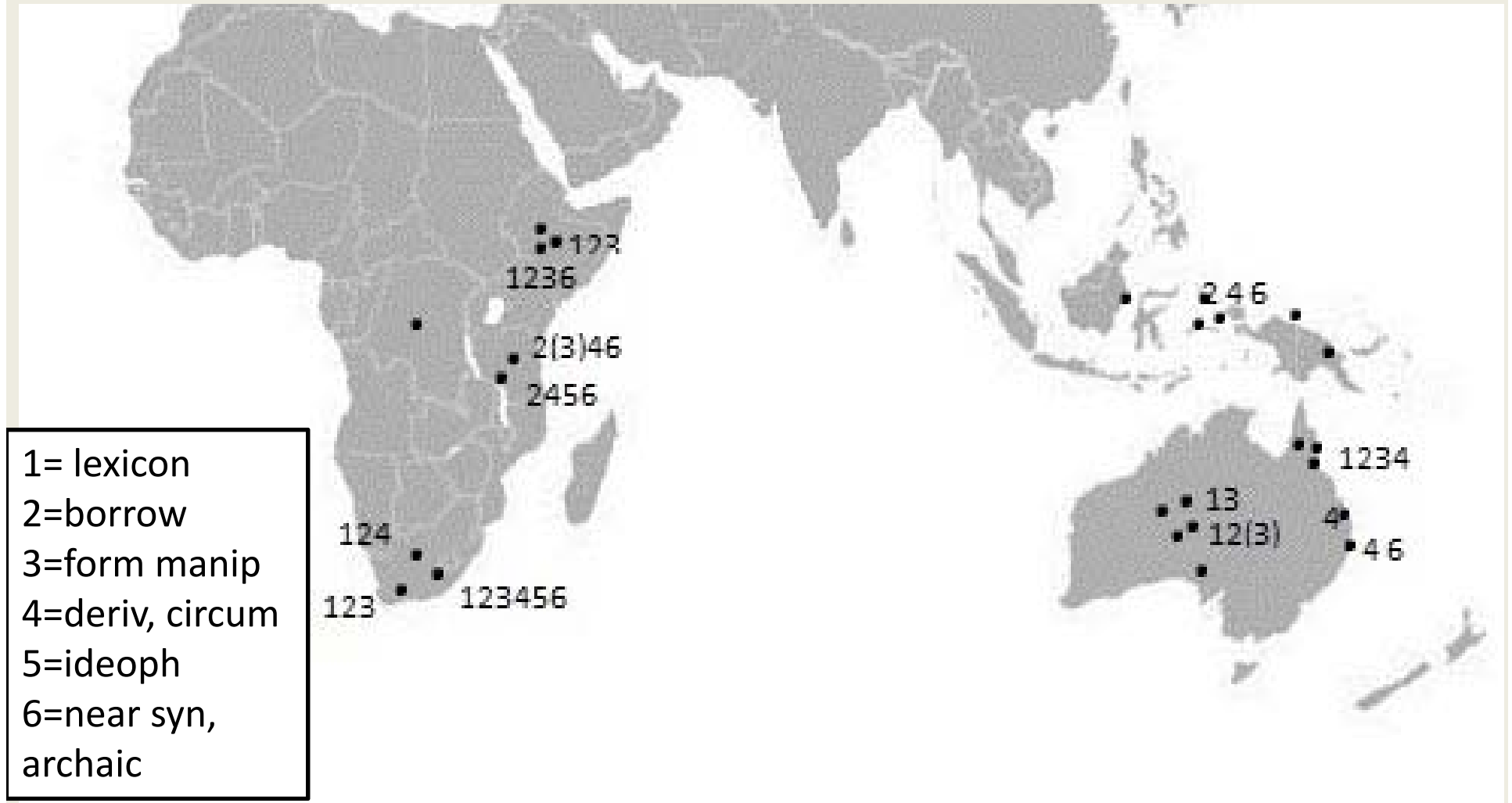
sound-a-  
like

all  
words

## 4.2 How to avoid

1. Lexicon of respect
2. Transfer from other language
3. Meaning manipulation
4. Form manipulations
5. Circumlocution, derivation
6. Ideophones

## 4.3 Map of manipulations



## 4.4 Different enough?

Paradox of changing the sound and avoid what is similar is sound.

Paradox of word from different language but within repertoire of speakers: speaker's reality of language.

## 4.5 Folk semantics

- for respect register: many to one relations (N/V differences) > native semantic classification
- in meaning manipulation > native semantic classification
- in same replacement for words similar in meaning

## 4.6 form manipulations

- first syllable or first consonant
- but keep gemination (Oromo daddafoo ‘hurry’ > soommafoo), place of articulation (Dyirbal nasal > corresponding stop)
- or to “strange” consonant or palatal consonant (keep voice in click replacement)

## 4.7 Grammar?

- pronouns
- noun class stability
- but also occasional noun class shift
- stem or word
- occasional affects prefixes, not suffixes



## 4.8 Actual use

- avoiding X is noted by hearer which eases understanding

# Conclusions

- Insights on view from within on language, language structures: folk phonology, morphology, semantics
- Phonology: different intonation and prosodic structure of words

# Language change

1. recognizability
2. borrowing independent of other borrowing
3. double reflexes
4. affect daily words without intense contact
5. introduction of phonological properties
6. strange phonological changes and lack of “ausnahmslosigkeit”
7. semantic change

**Thank you!**

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