

Minimal English for Dictionary Making in Revitalization Contexts

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Run down:

1. The challenge of writing accessible explanations of linguistic concepts
2. Minimal English as a possible tool
3. Minimal English scripts for linguistic concepts
4. Incorporating Minimal English scripts into revitalization lexicography

Writing accessible explanations of linguistic concepts

- Revitalization- must be led by the community to be successful
- However, linguists are often asked to assist
- one of the main roles for linguists is to assist with resource development, e.g. creating materials like learner dictionaries and community grammars
- This requires the linguist to be able to explain features of language in an accessible way

Simple from the community's point of view=

in terms that the community can understand =

using concepts the community already knows and is familiar with

- This is not as easy as it may sound

(On producing a first-draft wordlist for Ngarrindjeri)

“I will always remember one Ngarrindjeri man who came up to me and said ‘What use is this to me? I can’t even read it!’ This was an invaluable lesson for us; we had to modify our product.”

Mary-Anne Gale

“This was her first job. She’d come down and done a little bit of studying with me and talking to me about different issues and so on. And she started speaking in a professional manner in relation to words, and grammar, and whatever else you might call it. I said, ‘No, that’s no good, I’ve never done it and I don’t understand it’.”

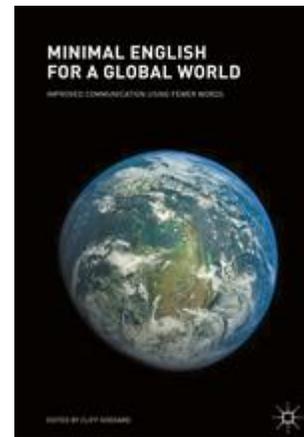
Uncle Ivan Couzens

What I have noticed...

- At the moment, developing accessible explanations of language is an inexact, approximate process
- Often the linguist produces an explanation which they *think* the community will understand
- Only to find that it overshoots the community's current knowledge— that it assumes many concepts which the community is unfamiliar with
- The linguist must then attempt to determine where the community's knowledge is *actually* at and scale the explanation back so that it builds on this
- This requires a lot of negotiation— a lot of back and forth between the linguist and community
- Wouldn't it be good if we could streamline this process?

Minimal English

- An accessible communication framework based on NSM
- Guiding principle– to communicate in universal and near-universal words as much as possible
- Semantic primes
- Semantic molecules
- Approximate semantic molecules (eat and drink)
- These words make up the core of Minimal English
- There are other universal words in this framework
- For details, see ‘Minimal English for a Global World’



<p>I you someone something~thing people body</p> 	<p>want don't want know think say feel see hear</p> <p>do happen move live die</p> 	<p>be (somewhere) there is be (someone/something) (is) mine</p> <p>kinds parts</p> <p>words</p> 
<p>when~time now before after a long time a short time</p> 	<p>for some time moment</p> <p>this the same other~else</p> 	<p>where~place here above below far near</p> <p>side inside touch</p> 
<p>one two some more</p> <p>all much~many little~few</p> 	<p>good bad very true</p> <p>big small</p> 	<p>not maybe can because if</p> <p>like</p> 

Semantic primes

hands, mouth, eyes, head, ears, nose, face, teeth, fingers, breast, skin, bones, blood	Body parts
long, round, flat, thin, hard, soft, sharp, smooth, heavy	Physical
be on something, at the top, at the bottom, in the middle, in front of, around	Spatial / physical
sky, the Earth, sun, moon, stars, ground, during the day, at night,	Environmental
day	Times
water, fire	Fire and water
creature, grow, egg, tail, wings, feathers	Biological
children, men, women, be born, mother, father, wife, husband	Biosocial
wood, stone	Materials
know (someone), be called	"Knowing" and "naming"
hold, make, kill, breathe, sleep, sit, lie, stand, play, laugh, sing	"Doing"

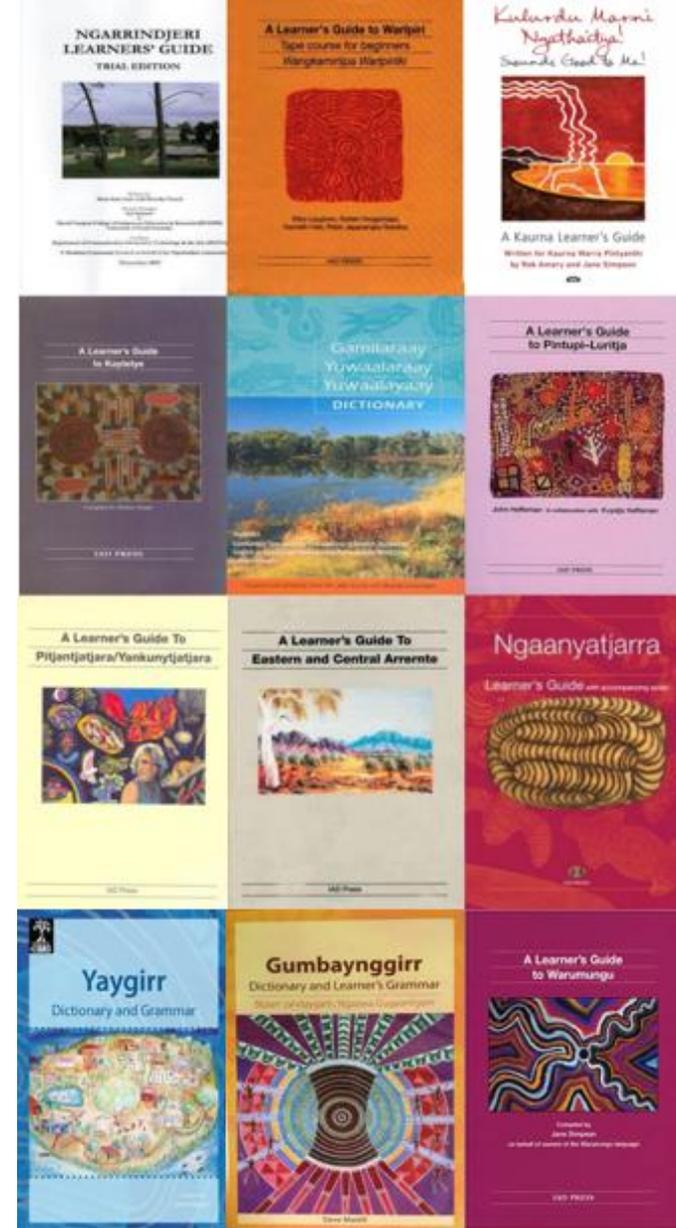
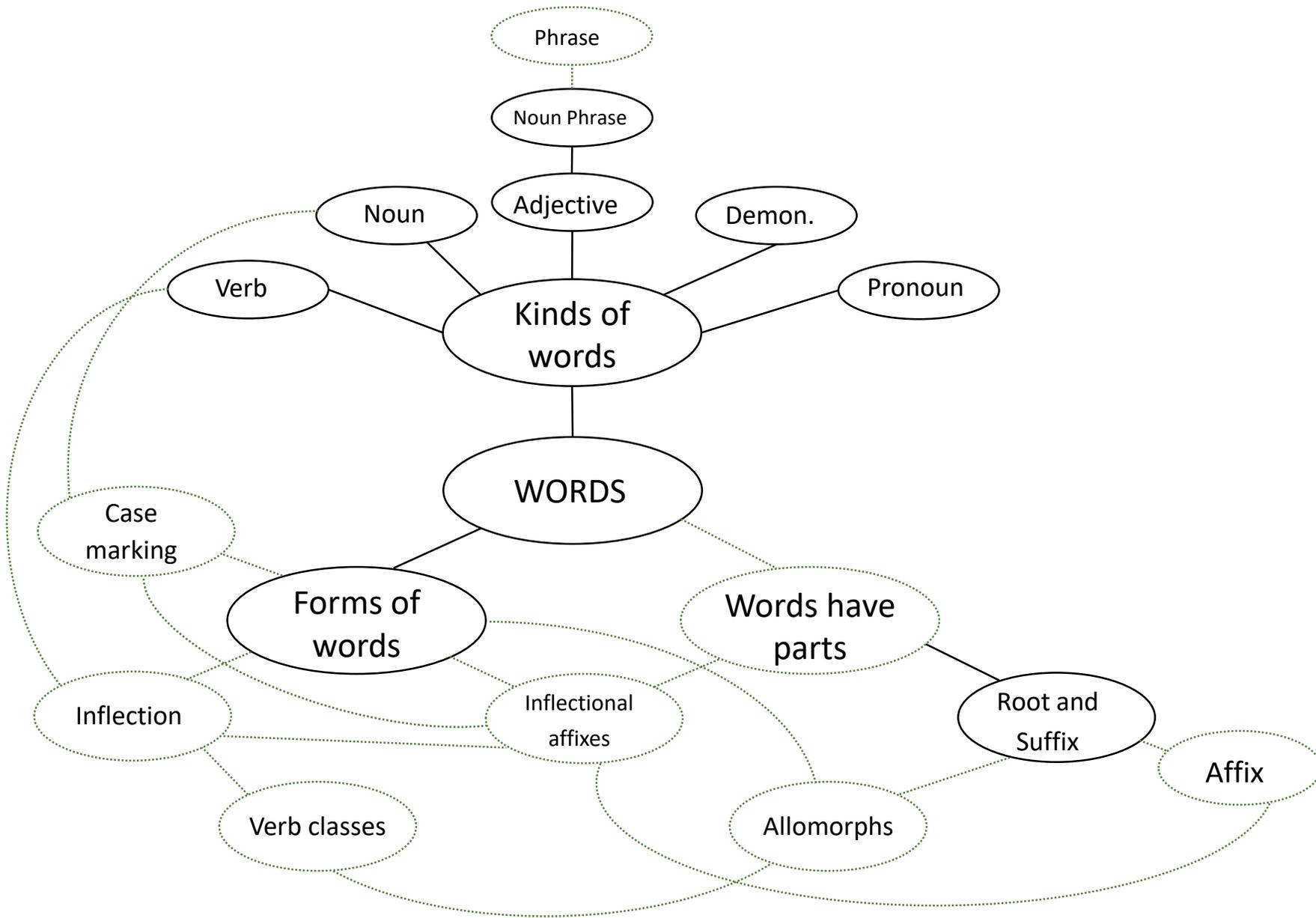
Minimal English

Why are these universal words a good foundation for a clear communication framework?

All people— regardless of their background— can be practically guaranteed to **already know** and understand them

accessible= using concepts the community **already knows**

By using Minimal English, linguists wouldn't have to guess whether the community already knows the concepts they are using to frame their explanation. They could safely assume that they do.



NOUN

When someone wants to know about something:

“what is it?”

They can know if you say something like:

“It is an (x)”

“It is a (y)”

“It is a (z)”

Words like these (x, y, z) are called nouns.

There are many other nouns.

This script...

...is not NSM

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-generic 'you'

-expandable vocabulary

-culturally-meaningful

examples

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A noun is a person, place or thing??

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1. The question and answer frames link the script to the language curriculum
2. This means it can easily be incorporated into lesson plans
3. The question frame gives learners a good vocab-learning tool
4. The script can be interactive

NOUN

When someone wants to know about something:

“what is it?” /language translation

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There are many other nouns.

An added benefit of Minimal English:

Some linguistic concepts are more basic, some are more complex

In a learning context, it is best to introduce the more basic ideas first

How do we determine which concepts are basic and which are complex? This is not always clear...

Minimal English can help determine the ideal order for introducing linguistic concepts

FORMS (OF A WORD)

There are some words: 'says', 'saying', 'said'

We can think about these words like this:
"it's the same word"

When it is like this, we can say: "'says', 'saying' and 'said' are forms of the same word. This word is 'say'"

At the same time, we can say: "The word 'say' has many forms. 'Says', 'saying' and 'said' are some of these forms."

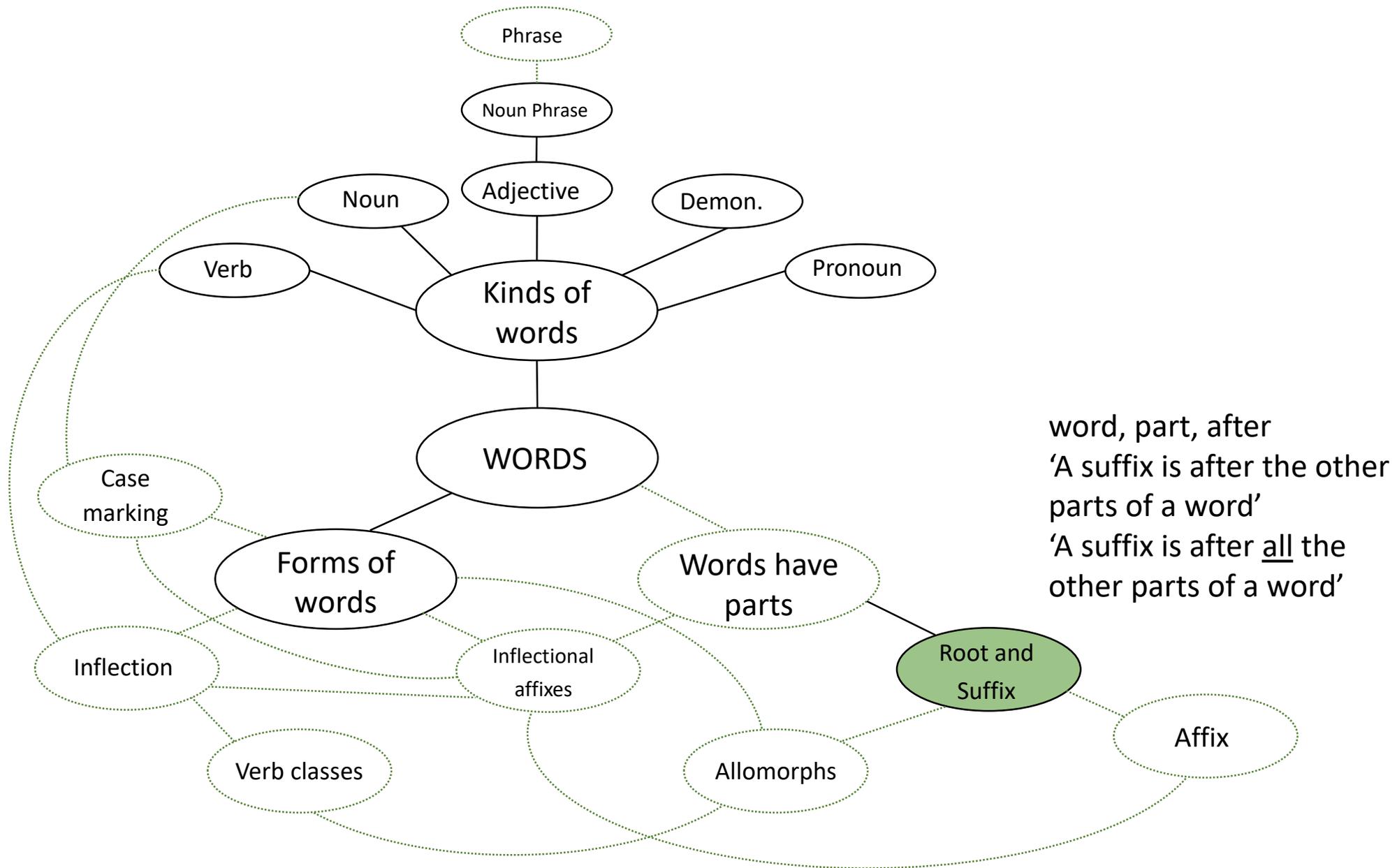
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ROOT AND SUFFIX

Some words are like this:

They have two parts. One of these parts is not like the other.

One part is like this: when someone says this part of a word, people can know well what is someone is talking about.

This part is called a 'root'

The other part is not like this. You say this part after you say the root.

This part is called a 'suffix'

We can see these two parts (the root and the suffix) if we write the word

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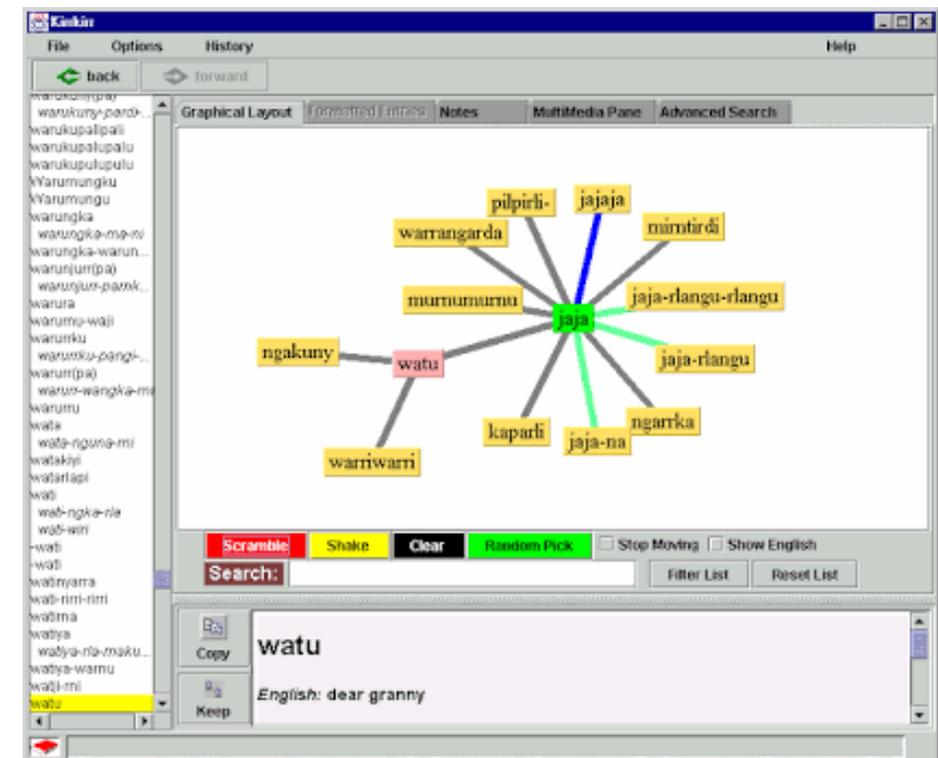
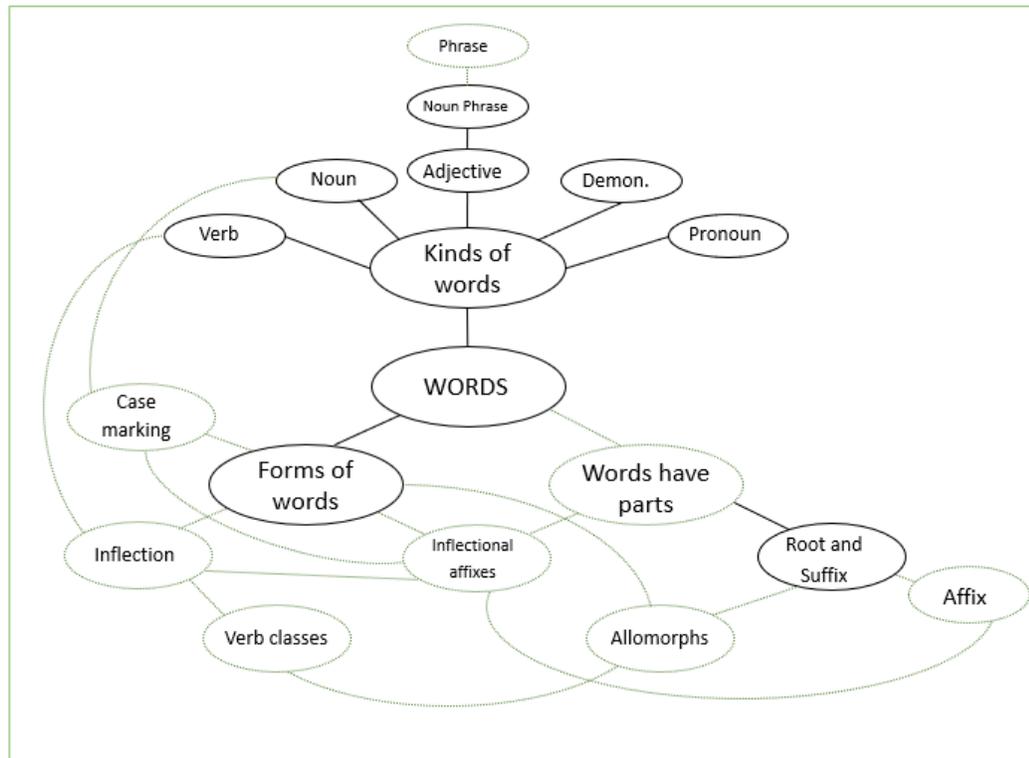
‘Suffix’

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How can MinEng be incorporated into dictionaries?

- A stand-alone dictionary of linguistic terms (can be used in tandem with language dictionaries)
- Electronic formats are more practical and offer more possibilities...
- Design?



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