

Speaker: **Claire Bower**
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Title: **Noun Incorporation?**

Date: Monday, February 06, 2006

Time: 4:00pm

Place: Rosenfeld Hall, Temple St (TBC)

Abstract:

The Nyulnyulan languages of Western Australia are an excellent family in which to study morpho-syntactic change amongst Australian languages. There are eight languages in the family, which is divided into two branches which share a great deal of lexical and morphological material in common. The languages are well-described by Australian standards, with dictionaries and reference grammars for four languages and documentation spanning approximately one hundred years.

While the two branches of the Nyulnyulan family are quite close, there are several striking differences. It is a startling fact that around two-thirds of the closed class of Eastern Nyulnyulan roots are directly reconstructible to Proto-Nyulnyulan roots, but the figure is much lower for the Western languages, in part because the Western languages also have more than twice as many roots as the Eastern languages (approximately 250 versus fewer than 100).

I use a combination of internal and comparative reconstruction to trace the history of verb root formation in the Nyulnyulan family. I propose here that many of the 'extra' roots in Western Nyulnyulan can be analyzed as fossilized combinations of incorporated nominal + monosyllabic verb root. I argue that the differences between Eastern and Western Nyulnyulan may be plausibly explained by positing a syntactic change which resulted in the loss of noun incorporation in Proto-Western Nyulnyulan.