

Wayan Fijian Classification of Marine Animals: Some Problems for Lexical Description and for Berlin's Universals of Taxonomic Rank and Nomenclature

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The classification of marine animals in Wayan, a dialect of Western Fijian, presents certain problems for lexical description and for Berlin's theory of universals of folk taxonomies. The descriptive problems relate chiefly to (a) the polysemy of a number of lexical units which serve as generics, (b) variability of reference according to context, (c) variability between informants, (d) fuzzy boundaries. I will focus on the use of several generic terms which are polysemous: *ika* 'fish; fish and fish-like creatures, *tuna* 'freshwater eels; eels', *seka* 'portunid crabs; crabs, *ura* 'shrimps; shrimps and lobsters', *manumanu qwaqwa* 'hard-shelled decapods', *civa* 'pearl shell; bivalves. While dictionary-makers would like to have well-defined and uniform semantic categories, the fact is that people use words in a creatively flexible way and tolerate fuzzy categories, especially in the use of generics.

Berlin (1992) proposed some universal principles concerning the classification and naming of plants and animals in folk taxonomies. Taxonomies of wild animals and plants usually have only three contrasting levels, represented by taxa at the rank of 'life form' (named by a unitary lexeme), 'folk generic' (unitary lexeme) and 'folk specific' (binomial), although an 'intermediate' level (usually covert, i.e. unnamed) is sometimes recognized. However, some branches of the Wayan taxonomy of marine animals show five and six contrasting levels, with one or two levels above the 'life form' rank and two levels intermediate between 'life-form' and 'folk generic'. Furthermore, these intermediate categories are not covert but are consistently named by simple lexemes. These more complex taxonomies appear to have arisen as natural extensions of basic three or four level schemas in contexts where more elaborate distinctions are useful.