**Non-configurationality in Warlpiri: another “free word order” problem**


**Claim:** Contrary to what has been argued for in earlier analyses, Warlpiri syntax is hierarchically structured and thus it can be accounted for by following standard generative assumptions.

**I. Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan, Australia) as non-configurational**

Non-configurationality was first used by Hale (1983) to describe languages, like Warlpiri, with the following properties:

a. *Free word order*\(^1\) (examples from Carnie, p.496)

\[(1) \begin{align*}
\text{a. Kurdu-ngku ka-ju nya-nyi ngaju} & \quad \text{S AUX V O} \\
\text{child-ERG PRES-1SOBJ see-NONPAST me-ABS} & \\
\text{“The child sees me.”} \\
\text{b. Kurdu-ngku ka-ju ngaju nya-nyi} & \quad \text{S AUX O V} \\
\text{c. Nya-nyi ka-ju Kurdu-ngku ngaju} & \quad \text{V AUX S O} \\
\text{d. Nya-nyi ka-ju ngaju Kurdu-ngku} & \quad \text{V AUX O S} \\
\text{e. Ngaju ka-ju nya-nyi Kurdu-ngku} & \quad \text{O AUX V S} \\
\text{f. Ngaju ka-ju Kurdu-ngku nya-nyi} & \quad \text{O AUX S V}
\end{align*}\]

b. *Possible pro-drop of all arguments and adjuncts* (examples from Carnie, p.499-500)

\[(2) \begin{align*}
\text{a. Ngarrka-nku ka panti-rni} & \quad \text{object drop} \\
\text{man-ERG AUX spear-NONPAST} & \\
\text{“The man is spearing it.”} \\
\text{b. Wawirri ka panti-rni} & \quad \text{subject drop} \\
\text{kangaroo AUX spear-NONPAST} & \\
\text{“He/she is spearing the kangaroo.”} \\
\text{c. Panti-rni ka} & \quad \text{subject and object drop} \\
\text{spear-NONPAST AUX} & \\
\text{“He/she is spearing it.”}
\end{align*}\]

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\(^1\) The second position having to be occupied by the auxiliary appears to be the only constraint on word order in Warlpiri.
c. Discontinuous DPs

(3) warlu-lku ka-rnalu wiri-wiri yirra-rni
firewood-then PRES.IMPF-1PL.EXCL big-big place-NPST
“then we put down big pieces of fire-wood”

II. Already existing analyses of non-configurationality

a. Austin and Bresnan 1996: “n-ary branching structure”

(4) The elements found under S, a headless constituent, are freely base-generated.

The asymmetries between arguments and adjuncts are encoded in an additional level of representation (using the LFG framework), and do not follow from the tree-structure.

IP is used to account for the second-position auxiliary (in I) and the position of the focused constituent (in Spec/IP).


(5) Argument positions are filled by pronominal clitics; overt DPs are adjuncts (Jelinek 1984).

or

Argument positions are filled by pros; overt DPs are left-dislocated (Baker 1996).

Some of the problems of PAs:

- There are semantic differences between arguments and adjuncts that cannot be accounted for if all overt DPs are treated like adjuncts.
Some verbs require their objects to receive a particular case, and overt DPs are case-marked accordingly.
- Some DPs can undergo pro-drop without any agreement-marking or cliticization.

### III. Legate’s structural account

Legate mainly opposes the analysis of Warlpiri syntactic structure as n-ary branching.

#### A. Evidence for asymmetric relations between DPs from Binding Theory

**Condition A:** the subject asymmetrically c-commands the reflexive object.

(6)  
- a. Purlka-jarra-rlu ka-pala-nyanu nya-nyi  
  old.man-DUAL-ERG PRES.IMPF-3DUAL-REFLEX see-NPST  
  “The two old men are looking at each other”
  
- b. *Purlka-jarra ka-nyanu-palangu nya-nyi  
  old.man-DUAL PRES.IMPF-REFLEX-3DUAL.OBJ see-NPST  
  Lit: “Each other are looking at the old men.”

**Condition B:** objects (base-generated within vP) can be distinguished from adjuncts (base-generated above vP).

(7)  
- a. *Jakamarra-rlu ka-(nyanu) nyanungu paka-rni  
  Jakamarra-ERG PRES.IMPF-(REFLEX) 3 hit-NPST  
  “Jupurrula is hitting him”
  
- b. Japanangka-rlu-nyanu yirra-rnu mulukunpa nyanungu-wana  
  Japanangka-ERG-REFLEX put-NPST bottle 3-PERL  
  “Japanangka set the bottle beside him.”

#### B. Evidence for structure within the VP

Based on crosslinguistic generalizations about symmetric and asymmetric applicatives, Legate concludes that Warlpiri has both.

- **Ditransitive constructions** are analyzed as ASYMMETRIC applicatives:
  
  i. Only AO (and not VO) has object properties (i.e. agreement)
  
  ii. Animacy restriction on AO

(8)  
Ngajulu-rlu kapi-rna-ngku karli-patu yi-nyi myuntu-ku  
I-ERG FUT.C-1SG.S-2SG.O boomerang-PAUC give-NPST you-DAT  
“I will give you (the) (several) boomerangs”
(iii.) Complementizer -kurra appears only when AO (and not VO) controls an embedded PRO infinitival subject.

(9) a. **AO controller**
    Narnta-ngku ku-ju kurdj miliki-yirra-rni [nguna-nja-kurra-(ku)]
    woman-ERG PRES.IMPF-1SG.O child show-put-NPST [lie-INFIN-OBJ.C-(DAT)]
    “The woman is showing the child to me [while I am lying down]”

    b. **VO controller**
    give-PST-1SG.S-3DAT child [coolamon-LOC sleep-INFIN-OBJ.C] that.DAT
    “I gave the child [which was sleeping in the coolamon] to that one.”

- **Ethical dative constructions** (x did y for z) are analyzed as **SYMMETRIC** applicatives:

  i. As it is generally the case for asymmetric applicatives crosslinguistically, both AO and VO trigger agreement on the auxiliary.

(10) Ngarrka-ngku ka-ju-rla ngaju-ku karli-ki warri-rni
    man-ERG PRES.IMPF-1SG.O-3DAT me-DAT boomerang-DAT seek-NPST
    “The man is looking for a boomerang for me”

  ii. No animacy restriction on AO

(iii.) Complementizer -kurra appears when either of AO or VO controls an embedded PRO infinitival subject.

(11) a. **AO controller**
    Kamina-rlu ka-rla mangarri purra ngati-nyanu-ku [nguna-nja-kurra-ku]
    girl-ERG PRES.IMPF-3DAT food cook.NPST mother-self-DAT [lie-INFIN-OBJ.C-DAT]
    “The girl is cooking food for her mother [who is lying down.]”

    b. **VO controller**
    Maliki-rna ramparl-luwa-ruw Jakamarra-ku [paranka-nja-kurra]
    dog-1SG accident-hit-PST Jakamarra-DAT [run-INFIN-OBJ.C]
    “I accidently hit Jakamarra’s dog [while it was running.]”

Importantly, the existence of **ASYMMETRIC** and **SYMMETRIC** applicatives in Warlpiri goes against LFG accounts which predict that languages are **either** asymmetric **or** symmetric by proposing an **Asymmetrical Object Parameter**.

Instead, Legate explains symmetry and asymmetry in Warlpiri using hierarchical relations:
(12) Asymmetric applicatives

The applicative phrase is a complement to the verb.
The head of the applicative phrase is prepositional, and assigns case to the VO.
AO raises to receive case from $v$.

Asymmetry is attributed to the fact that only AO enters a verb-object relationship.

(13) Symmetric applicatives

The applicative phrase dominates the verb.
The head of the applicative phrase is verbal.
VO raises to receive case from the verbal applicative morpheme; AO raises to receive case from $v$.

Symmetry obtains from the fact that both AO and VO enter a relationship with a verb.

C. Evidence for structure above the VP

According to Legate, “word order in Warlpiri is not freely base-generated, but rather determined by movement to hierarchically organized projections located in the left-periphery of the clause.”

(14) \[ \text{Rizzi's structure of CP} \]

“Warlpiri displays two hierarchically ordered topic projections as well as two hierarchically ordered focus.”

(15) \[ \text{Warlpiri left-periphery} \]
The second position auxiliary is explained as raising to the head of the highest active functional projection.

The placement of wh-phrases in focus position is accomplished through movement.

(16) a. **Nyiya ngapa-ngka nyamprirl-wanti-ja?**
what water-LOC splash-fall-PST
“What fell with a splash into the water?”

   b. **Kurdu marda ngapakurra wanti-ja.**
   child perhaps water-LOC fall-PST
   “The child probably fell into the water.”

**WH**-movement is also subject to island constraints.

(17) a. **Karnta-ngku warlu yarrlu-rnu [kuyu purra-nja-kungarnti].**
woman-ERG fire light-PST [meat cook-INF-PREP.C]
“The woman lit the fire [in order to cook meat].”

   **Attempted extraction out of an adjunct**
   b. *Nyiya-kungarnti karnta-ngku warlu yarrpu-rnu [purra-nja-kungarnti].
      what-PREP.C woman-ERG fire light-PST [cook-INF-PREP.C]
   “What did the woman light the fire [in order to cook]?”

**WH**-phrases may also appear with, and be distinct from, focused constituents, in which case focused elements **must** precede wh-phrases, suggesting that the projection hosting focus dominates the projection hosting the wh-phrase.

(18) (I don’t care where the children were playing.)
**Ya-nu-pala nyarrpara-kurra kurdu-jarra?**
go-PST-DUAL where-to child-DUAL
“Where did the children go?”

**IV. Legate’s conclusions**

- Non-configurational Warlpiri analyses involving flat structure must be rejected.
- Evidence comes from within the VP (existence of asymmetric and symmetric applicatives) and above the VP (existence of a functional complex above CP and achievement of wh-placement through movement).
- The claim that there exists such a thing as non-configurational languages is weakened.