

Argument coding and clause linkage in Australian Aboriginal languages

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Outline

- ❑ Motivation and history
- ❑ A theoretical model
- ❑ A descriptive typology
- ❑ Possible linkage accounts
- ❑ Conclusions

Motivation

In languages of Gascoyne-Ashburton region of Western Australia coding of verb arguments depends on clause type, with dependent linked clauses having different encoding from main clauses, e.g.

Jiwarli

Burrardi-lu birru gamba-nha

woman-erg meat.acc cook-pres

A.main P.main Vtr.main

‘The woman is cooking meat.’

Burrardi *buna* [____ *birru-rla* *gamba-ru*]
woman.nom go.pres meat.**allat** cook-purpSS
S.main Vi.main **A.dep** **P.dep** Vtr.dep

‘The woman is going to cook meat.’

Burrardi *gumba-inha* [____ *birru-wu* *gamba-rnu*]
woman.nom sit-pres meat.**dat** cook-imperfSS
S.main Vi.main **A.dep** **P.dep** Vtr.dep

‘The woman is sitting down cooking meat.’

History

In Jane Simpson's 1983 MIT dissertation (also her 1991 book) she gives examples in Warlpiri of nominal arguments in dependent clause constructions being marked in **different** ways from nominal arguments in main clauses (e.g. no case, dative case, dependent verb inflection instead of case, etc.)

I then looked at descriptions of other languages, e.g. Dench on Nyamal and Ngarla, northern WA, and realised that there were several patterns found across the continent. Over time these observations evolved into the present paper offered in honour of Jane.

A theory of argument encoding

Silverstein (1974, 1976, 1980, 1993)

- Variable I.** The inherent referential content of noun phrases, coded ‘locally’ in noun phrase categories, and organised by criteria of both pragmatic and semantic markedness into a feature-space of categories of referring;
- Variable II.** The case relations - ‘Agent of’, ‘Patient of’, ‘Subject of’, ‘Dative of’ (A, P, S, D) - that noun phrases bear within schemata of predicate argument relationships at the clause level of analysis, however we wish to represent these;
- Variable III.** The (logical) clause-linkage type connecting two (or more) clause-level structures in a complex or compound sentence, or in sequential discourse, forming a kind of hierarchy of tightness of linkage ..., evidenced by greater and greater deformation of the full, plain surface structure of at least one, and sometimes both, of the clauses;
- Variable IV.** The reference-maintenance relations of arguments of predicates (as expressed by noun-phrases in non-linked clausal structures) across discourse-level structures, so-called anaphoric ‘coreference’ and ‘switch-reference’ being names for specific types of formal-functional systems for indicating this.

A typology of argument encoding

1. *main clause* strategy: code arguments in the same way as in main clauses (ignore Variables III and IV), e.g. Diyari, Gamilaraay, central Ngayarta (Martuthunira, Panyjima);
2. *suspension* strategy: bare arguments without case marking co-occur with the dependent verb, e.g. Warlpiri (some clause types only);
3. *copy* strategy: copy the dependent verb morphology onto the arguments of the dependent verb, e.g. Warlpiri (for some non-adjacent P), Kurrama and Nyamal (for some clause types), Djapu (peripheral dependent clauses, purpose clauses);
4. *addition* strategy: add an additional layer of associating case to regular (main clause) coding, e.g. Kayardild;
5. *replacement* strategy: replace the usual (main clause) argument coding with another coding not otherwise used for verb arguments, e.g. Yidiny, Nyamal (for some clause types), Gascoyne-Ashburton (purpose same-subject clauses), Djapu (reduced relative clauses), Warlpiri A (for some clause types);
6. *dative/possessive* strategy: argument coding in dative case, the adnominal case commonly used for alienable possession in Australia. Note that this neutralises transitivity distinctions between clause types, e.g. Gascoyne-Ashburton languages P (for some clause types), Warlpiri P (for some clause types);
7. *zero* strategy: obligatory null expression of arguments under coreference (Variable IV, typically A/S=A/S), e.g. Warlpiri, Gascoyne-Ashburton, Pilbara, Yolngu (reduced relative clauses).

Typology exemplification 1

Strategy	Language	Dependent clause type	Notes
1. Main clause	Diyari, Gamilaraay, Arrente, Pitjantjatjara, central Ngayarta	all	
2. Suspension	Warlpiri	some nominalisations	only 1 exemplar
3. Copy	Warlpiri	nominalisations split by AUX	
	Nyamal	past relative and jussive complement (purposive)	
	Djapu	purpose, causal	
4. Addition	Kayardild	complements of immediate perception predicates	only 1 exemplar

Typology exemplification 2

5. Replacement	Nyamal	relative and stative relative	A → source; P → stative
	Kanyara-Mantharta	purpose same-subject	P → allative
	Djapu	reduced relative	non-human A → associative, human A → origin
	Dhangu	nominalised	A → adessive
	Yidiny	purposive	P → dative
		causal	P → causal
adversative		A → fear	

6. Dative - possessive	Kanyara-Mantharta	intensive, imperfective and perfective relative-same subject	P → dative
	Nyamal	purpose-same subject	P → dative
	Ngarla	purposive, privative, relative-same subject	P → dative
	Wambaya	purposive	P → dative
	Warlpiri	different-subject complement	P → dative

7. Zero	see Table 2		
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Strategy co-occurrence

Nyamal				Ngarla				Jiwarli			
	Cl	Ca	Co		Cl	Ca	Co		Cl	Ca	Co
purp(desid)	Main	E		purp	Main	E		purpDS	Dep	E	
purp(impl)	Dep	D	H	purp	Dep	D	H	purpSS	Dep	All	H
privative	M/D	D	H	privative	M/D	D	H	intent	Dep	D	H
relativeSS	Dep	Stat	C	relativeSS	Dep	D	H	imperfSS	Dep	D	H
relativeDS	Dep	Scce	C	relativeDS	Dep	Scce	C	imperfDS	Dep	D	H
past rel	Dep	I	C	past rel	Dep	Abl	C	perfSS/DS	Dep	D	H
purp(juss)	Dep	I	C								
				habit.nom	NML	D	H	agt.nom	NML	D	H
purp.nom	NML	I	C	purp.nom	NML	D	H				
inst.nom	NML	I	C	inst.nom	NML	D	H	inst.nom	NML	D	H

Key to table

Cl *Clause status*
 Main main clause
 Dep dependent clause
 M/D main and dependent
 NML nominalisation

Ca *Case Marking*
 E ERG:ABS
 D (NOM):DAT
 I verb inflection
 Abl Ablative
 Scce Source
 All Allative

Co *Complementizer*
 H head-marking on verb
 C complete concord

Proposed clause linkage typologies

1. the **discourse function** of clauses (main and subordinate) determines their syntactic form (degree of nominalisation and expression as independent verbal predicates). See Hopper & Thompson 1980, Fox 1983, and O'Dowd 1992.
2. the **semantic link** between the predicates of the main and dependent clauses (sometimes called the 'degree of bonding') determines their syntactic forms (the degree of nominalisation and expression as independent verbal predicates). See Givón 1980, Silverstein (1976, 1980, 1993), Foley & van Valin (1983), Van Valin (1984, 1993), Van Valin & La Polla (1998), Lehmann (1988), and Cristofaro (2003).

I am skeptical of both proposals

1. Comparison of Jiwarli clause-linkage and Silverstein's hierarchy shows that there are some similarities and differences. Jiwarli (and most Australian languages) does not distinguish (adnominal) relative clauses from adverbial clauses expressing background information (the imperfective and perfective types) so there is **no language-internal reason** for seeing relativised clauses **linked more tightly** than adverbials (contra Silverstein)
2. What this and other inconsistencies suggests is that a Silverstein-like clause linkage hierarchy is potentially applicable cross-linguistically, but that it requires a **great deal of detailed investigation** before gaining full empirical support
3. **Language-particular factors** (such as the non-distinction of relative and adverbial clauses in Australian languages) are likely to play a part in any comprehensive account.

Conclusions

1. Data from Australian languages shows that there are **seven different strategies** available for languages to code dependent arguments of hypotactically linked clauses
2. Several strategies can coexist in a given language
3. Hierarchies of formal deformation and degree of nominalisation have been set up by typologists and related to non-canonical (non-main clause) argument coding
4. None of these deals with the **richness of coding types** identified in Australia
5. Whether it is possible to **correlate** these proposed hierarchies cross-linguistically, let alone whether we can **predict** argument coding strategy distributions from an all encompassing hierarchy of clause linkage types, remain **open questions** for further research.

Thank you,
the audience, and
Jane