

Warlpiri: Theoretical Implications

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The issue of non-configurationality is fundamental in determining the possible range of variation in Universal Grammar. This dissertation investigates this issue in the context of Warlpiri, the prototypical non-configurational language. I argue that positing a macroparameter, a single parameter that distinguishes configurational languages from non-configurational, requires variation on a magnitude not permitted by Universal Grammar. After refuting in detail previous macroparametric approaches, I propose a microparametric analysis: non-configurational languages are fully configurational and analysed through fine-grained parameters with independent motivation. I develop this approach for Warlpiri, partially on the basis of new data collected through work with Warlpiri consultants and analysis of Warlpiri texts.

Beginning with A-syntax, I show that Warlpiri exhibits short-distance A-scrambling through binding and WCO data. I present an analysis of split ergativity in Warlpiri (ergative/absolutive case-marking, nominative/accusative agreement), deriving the split from a dissociation of case and agreement, and the inherent nature of ergative case, rather than from non-configurationality. Extending the analysis to applicative constructions in Warlpiri, I identify both symmetric and asymmetric applicatives. I argue that the principled distinctions between them are explained structurally rather than lexically; therefore the applicative data provide evidence for a hierarchical verb phrase in Warlpiri. The analysis reveals the first reported distinction between unaccusative and unergative verbs in the language.

Turning to A'-syntax, I argue that word order is not free in Warlpiri; rather Warlpiri displays an articulated left peripheral structure. Thus, word order variations are largely determined by positioning of elements in ordered functional projections based on their status in the discourse. Furthermore, I present evidence from WCO and island effects that elements appear in these projections through movement. Finally, I investigate the wh-scope marking construction, arguing for an indirect dependency approach. In developing the analysis, I argue, contrary to standard assumptions, that the dependent clauses related with verbs of saying in Warlpiri are embedded rather than adjoined. On the basis of a poverty of the stimulus argument, I conclude the construction must follow from independent properties of the language. I propose that it follows from the discontinuous constituent construction, which I equate with split DPs/PPs in Germanic and Slavic languages.

The syntactic structure of Warlpiri that emerges from the dissertation strongly supports a configurational analysis of the language, and thereby the microparameter approach to nonconfigurationality.