

Verb excorporation in four Gunwinyguan languages

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ALW 2024 · 21 September

Outline

Background

Formal properties

Narrative uses

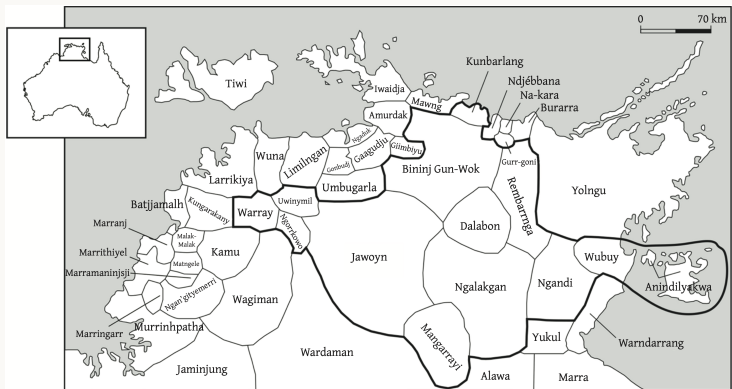
Theoretical implications

Conclusions

BACKGROUND

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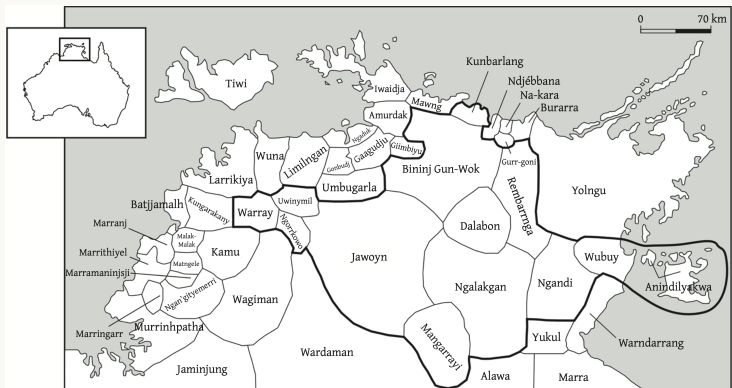
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Structure of the verb

- ▶ Words organised according to template, e.g., Ngalakgan (Merlan, 1983):

	-6	(-5)	(-4)	(-3)	(-2)	(-1)	0	(+1)	+2	(+3)	(+4)	(+5)
Subject(/object)	Various adverbial	Benefactive	Various adverbial	Incorp. nominal	Transitiviser	Verb stem	Reflexive/reciprocal	Tense/aspect	Negation	Number	Subordination	

- ▶ Most basic verb involves pronominal prefix, verb stem, and tense suffix

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‘They galloped.’

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A different structure?

Worrowk burru-miny
gallop 3PL-PPUN
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Excorporation

- ▶ The verb stem occurs **outside the verbal word** / is 'excorporated'
- ▶ Found in four languages: Ngalakgan (Baker & Harvey, 2003), Rembarrnga (McKay, 1975), Dalabon (Evans et al., 2008), Jawoyn (Merlan, 1989)
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Research questions

- ▶ What kinds of verbs can be excorporated, and is the resulting construction more word-like or more phrase-like?
- ▶ Is there any difference in meaning compared to regular verbs? Under what conditions does excorporation occur?
- ▶ What formal theory of language is best suited to analysing these structures?

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Data

- ▶ 136 texts/recordings reviewed for excorporation constructions in Jawoyn, Dalabon, Ngalakgan, and Rembarrnga
- ▶ Excorporation occurs in 48/136 texts (about 1.5% of all verbs in corpus)
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FORMAL PROPERTIES

Simple verbs

- ▶ Most excorporation constructions involve simple verb stems which occur initially and are pronounced prominently:

(1) Ngalakgan

a. Ngu-**ngeyh**-miny
1SG-get.up-PPUN
'I got up.'

b. **Ngeyh!** ngu-miny
get.up 1SG-PPUN
'I got up.'

(2) Dalabon

a. Kah-lng-**walk**-karr-inj
3SG-SEQ-hide-RR-PPUN
'He hid himself.'

b. **Walk!** kah-lng-karr-inj
hide 3SG-SEQ-RR-PPUN
'He hid himself.'

Simple verbs

- ▶ Rembarrnga and Jawoyn use a particular verb in the second word:

(3) Rembarrnga

a. Nga-**ngalh**-miny
1SG-climb-PPUN
'I climbed up.'

b. **Ngalh** nga-many
climb 1SG-GO.PPUN
'I climbed up.'

(4) Jawoyn

a. Bu-**yi'**-meyn
3PL-get.up-BE.PPUN
'They got up.'

b. **Yi'** buyn-ju-ngay
get.up 3PL-DO-PCON
'They got up.'

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Complex verbs

- ▶ Sometimes verb includes an incorporated noun:

(5) **Kodj-dayadadj** bulah-kang
head-chop 3PL>3PL-TAKE.PPUN
'They chopped the heads off.' (Dalabon)

(6) **Guh-warrh** ngubu-miny-birrah
dead-throw 1SG>3PL-PPUN-DU
'I threw them two (echidnas) down dead.'
(Ngalakgan)

Ordering restrictions

- ▶ You can't reorder the parts of the construction
- ▶ Nothing can go in between them

(7) Ngalakgan

a. *Burru-miny wurrpbar
3PL-PPUN gather

Intended: 'They gathered.'

b. *Wurrpbar gelk-gah burru-miny
gather river.bank-LOC 3PL-PPUN

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Are they phrases?

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NARRATIVE USES

Usage as ideophones

- ▶ Excorporation can be used to embellish narratives, similar to ideophones
- ▶ Ideophones are interjection-like words similar to verbs, used for dramatic function in stories
- ▶ Very similar to nearby languages with ideophones, like Wubuy (Heath, 1976, p. 737):

(8) **jalg!** ni-ya_{ldh}-iny
go.past 3SG-go.past-PPUN
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Expressing sudden events

- ▶ Excorporation mainly expresses sudden actions, like changes in state/stance, or very short events:

(9) **Dur~dur** burru-miny
RDP~sit.down 3PL-PPUN

‘They sat down right there.’ (Ngalakgan)

(10) **Dowk!** kah-Ing-da-nginj
burst 3SG-SEQ-STAND-PCON

‘Bang! The boil burst open!’ (Dalabon)

Expressing sudden events

- ▶ Events that have inherent duration are converted to change of state meanings:

(11) Rembarrnga

a. Yarra-yappah-rumh-miny

1PL-DU-sleep-PPUN

‘We two **were sleeping.**’

b. Rumh yarra-yappah-many

sleep 1PL-DU-GO.PPUN

‘We two **fell asleep.**’

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Highlighting important events

- ▶ Excorporation is used to highlight important events in a story:

(12) Ngayu-marden ngan-gurryurr ngan-ngeya-muyuk ngan-bok-muyuk
3SG-as.for backbone whatsit bum
guluy'mi. Ya. "Nyi-goj'~goyi-n-gu." Goy'~goyi-nay nabay
ribcage okay 12DU-go.back-PRES-SUB 3SG.go.back-PCON that
darra mam **wirt!** **bon-juy.** Wirt. "Nabay
too devil whistle 3SG>3PL-DO-PPUN whistle.sound that
na-yenang nyin-wirt-mar?"
what 3SG>12DU-whistle-PRES

'And as for him, (he took) the spine with what's it, with the tail part, and the ribcage. Ok. "We'll go back (to eat)". He was going back, and **that devil whistled at them**. Whiss! [whistling sound] "What's that whistling at you and me?"" (Jawoyn)

Highlighting important events

- ▶ Excorporation is also used after a series of actions, either expressing a culmination or the beginning of a new action:

(13) Ngalakgan

Mu-boromon burrmu-boh, burru-yony,
grass 3PL>III-hit.PPUN 3PL-lie.PPUN

burru-berlengh-mitjji-ni, **worro~worrowk** **burru-miny.**
3PL-lick-RR-PCON RDP~gallop 3PL-PPUN

Burru-rabo.
3PL-go.PPUN

‘Those kangaroos ground up (and ate) the grass, they were lying there licking themselves (on the forearms), then **they galloped away**. They went.’

Highlighting important events

(14) Dalabon

Kah-dja-ni::: kenbo kah-dja-berrh...berrh...berrûh-minj
3SG-just-sit.PCON then 3SG-just-come.out...come.out...come.out-PCON

... Kunnumh-yah kah-danginj. Kanûnh-kuno kûhdû,
stop-just 3SG-spear.PCON this-time thus

dorrng-no-duninj, kah-Ing-dorrng-burlh-minj djirrh ngurk
body-DEF-really 3SG-body-appear-PPUN spear heart

bûkah-yelûng-ngurl-dulubong **ngurl-wirb!**
3SG>3SG-then-heart-spear.PPUN heart-rip

bûkah-ngurl-wirb-mey.
3SG>3SG-heart-rip-GET.PPUN

‘He just sat there and then he saw him coming out. He stopped himself from spearing, but now this time the Mimih’s body really came out, and so he speared him then, right in the heart, then **rip! He ripped his heart out.**’

Usage in language revival

- ▶ **Excorporation can play an important role in storytelling**
- ▶ None of these languages are being acquired by children, and three don't have fluent speakers
- ▶ Having a description of it could be helpful in understanding older published texts

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- ▶ Ngalakgan: word consisting only of a prefix and suffix?
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- ▶ Additional meaning of 'suddenly' not contributed by any individual component
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Traditional view

- ▶ **The lexicon is a list of all items with non-compositional (i.e., unpredictable) meaning**
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Construction Grammar

- ▶ Both verbs are “Constructions” – pairings of meaning and form (Booij, 2010; Jackendoff & Audring, 2020)
- ▶ Not important whether they are words or phrases, which are already difficult to tell apart in Gunwinyguan languages (Baker, 2018)
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Relational Morphology

- ▶ Relational Morphology (Jackendoff & Audring, 2020) is a Construction-oriented framework
- ▶ Alternations expressed as parallel surface-based relations between structures, not derivations from underlying forms

(15) a. Semantics: [PP([GALLOP(3PL_{1,2}))]₃)₄]₅
Morphosyntax: {V₃, PP₄, 3₁, PL₂}₅,₆
Phonology: /puru_{1,2} worowk₃ min₄ /₅

b. Semantics: [EX([PP([GALLOP(3PL_{1,2}))]₃)₄]₅)]₆
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- b. Semantics: $[EX([PP([GALLOP(3PL_{1,2})]_3)_4]_5)]_6$
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- ▶ Speakers can use schemas to construct novel forms even when those forms have unpredictable semantics

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- ▶ Productive non-compositional meaning
- ▶ Prefix and suffix are “baked in” to the Construction, kind of like an idiom with fixed parts
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CONCLUSIONS

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- ▶ **Excorporation in four Gunwinyguan languages: Dalabon, Jawoyn, Ngalakgan, Rembarrnga**
- ▶ Verb stem occurs external to and directly in front of the rest of the verbal word
- ▶ Used for dramatic effect like ideophones, highlights important events in narratives and has meaning 'suddenly'
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Thank you!*

* Especial thanks to Brett Baker for supervising this project. Thanks to Graham McKay, Maïa Ponsonnet, and Mark Harvey for data and discussion.

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