

Polarity and gradience in Wardaman verbal predicates



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The project in a nutshell

- Preliminary exploration into Wardaman verbal predicates
- How are different verbal elements organised in the language?

Contents

Background and context

Data and methods

Findings

Reflections

Complex verbs

- Northern Australian verbs commonly consist of two elements, ‘complex verbs’ (Bowern, 2014)
- One inflected element (‘verb’), one uninflected element (‘coverb’)
- ‘Verbs’ can often be predicates on their own (‘simple verbs’)

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Complex verbs

(1) Jaminjung (Schultze-Berndt, 2000, p. 4)

a. gani-**ma**-m jurruny-ni
3SG/3SG-**hit**-PRES lower.arm-INST

‘He hits him with the hand.’

b. miri **bag** burra-**ma**-nyi gurrubardu-ni
leg **break** 3PL/3SG-**hit**-IMPF boomerang-INST

‘They used to break its legs with a boomerang.’

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- Areal: Wagiman, Jaminjung, Mangarrayi, Bilinarra, etc.
- Typical inventory is ~30–40 verbs, hundreds of coverbs (Schultze-Berndt, 2003)
- What determines the combination of verb and coverb?

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Previous studies

- Several proposals in the literature (Baker & Harvey, 2010; McGregor, 2002; Schultze-Berndt, 2000; Wilson, 1999)
- Schultze-Berndt: in Jaminjung, verbs combine with coverbs on the basis of **semantic** compatibility
- Is this also the case for Wardaman?

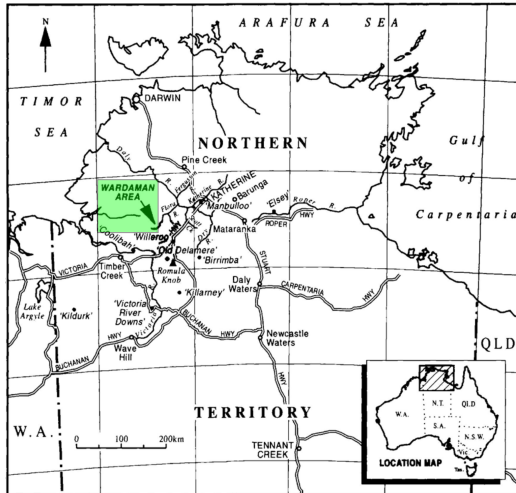
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- Non-Pama–Nyungan, spoken in Katherine area in NT (Merlan, 1994)
- Unusually sized inventory of 130 inflecting verbs...
- Simple and complex verbs, hundreds of coverbs
- Some verbs **can't** appear with coverbs...
- Polarity: some verbs combine freely, others don't

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- Why is there **polarity** in the combinatory freedom of Wardaman verbs?
- What does this say about the organisation of Wardaman's verbal system?

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- 810 simple verbs, 344 complex verbs, and 80 bare coverbs

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- Every construction entered into spreadsheet

Recording	Timestamp	Segmentation	Gloss	Verb	Meaning	Coverb	Meaning	Overall Meaning
wrr0148	00:00:20	wud-janga-ndi-ya	3NSG-come-PST-NAR	nyanga	come			come
wrr0148	00:00:22	wunggunburr-me-ndi-ya	3NSG/3NSG-get-PST-NAR	me	get			get; pick up
wrr0148	00:00:25	yanggi-ya gayardung	3SG.go.PST-NAR run	ya	go	gayardung	run	run
wrr0148	00:00:29	ø-ga-ndi-ya warduj	3SG-take-PST-NAR vanish	ga	take	warduj	vanish	take (sth) away
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- Verbs with non-trivial frequency (> 10) considered in analysis
- New data can be added easily; useable for other research on Wardaman verbs

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Analysis

- Semantic analysis of verbs in simple and complex constructions
- Comparison with semantics of 'simple-only' verbs
- Can semantics of the verb tell us anything about its combinatory freedom?

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- These four verbs constitute 32% of the corpus
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Finding 1

- As an example: *gi-* ‘put’

(2) a. yirr-**gi**-ndi-ya wuja-ya
1EXPL/3SG-put-PST-NAR fire-LOC

‘We put it (a mussel) on the fire.’

[wrr0153/01:09]

b. jabalawarna-ya wurr-**gi**-ndi-ya
flat.stone-LOC 3PL/3SG-put-PST-NAR

‘They put it (a currant) on a flat rock.’

[wrr0123/02:22]

Finding 1

S(i) *gi-* 'PUT'

x causes y to be in a locative relation with respect to a location

- Simply causing something to be in a place, highly generic
- The manner of the 'putting' is unspecified

Finding 1

- In complex verbs, *gi-* is further specified by the coverb:

- (3) a. wurr-**gi**-ndi-ya **dun~dunma**, wurr-ngu-ndi-ya
3PL/3SG-put-PST-NAR RDP~tip.out, 3PL/3SG-eat-PST-NAR
‘They tipped it out, then they ate it.’ [wrr0153/01:53]
- b. **murl** wunggunburr-**gi**-ndi-ya
cover.up 3PL/3PL-put-PST-NAR
‘They covered them up.’ [wrr0121/00:28]

Finding 1

- The generic meaning can be elaborated by the use of coverbs:

S(i) *gi-* 'PUT'

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⋮

Elaboration

S(ii) *gi-* ___ Coverb_{Activity} /
___ Coverb_{Visibility}

x causes y to be in a locative relation with respect to a location / observer in manner z

- Underspecified semantics of *gi-* permits further modification

Finding 2

- Verbs with limited or no combinatory freedom are semantically ‘full’/more specified
- Exemplars include *dagbarla-* ‘have’, *gomarla-* ‘follow’, *ngu-* ‘eat’, and *ba-* ‘burn’
- Always or almost always appear as simple verbs

Finding 2

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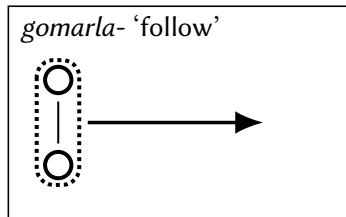
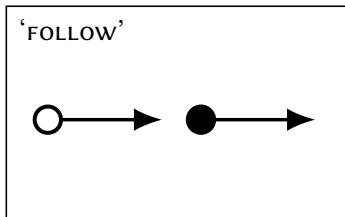
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- As an example: *gomarla-* ‘follow/accompany’

- (4) a. wurr-**gomarla**-rri-ya-wuya gunudjarri
3PL/3SG-follow-PST-NAR-DU blackheaded.python
‘They accompanied the blackheaded python (to its destination).’ [wrr0270/07:20]
- b. ngayi-**gomarla**-n nanani yiguyu-ngunung
1INDU/3SG-follow-PRES that mother-1SG.DAT
‘Let’s accompany my mother (back home).’ [wrr0138/00:39]

Finding 2



Moving figure



'Glue'



Participant with respect to which motion is oriented



Path

Finding 2

- Joint, mutual motion central to the semantics of *gomarla-*

S(i) *gomarla-*
'FOLLOW'

x and *y* are joint and equal agents that move along the same path together, such that neither *x* nor *y* controls the path or movement of the other

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- Manner of relation between participants already explicit...

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Overall findings

- Wardaman verbs form a **spectrum** of combinatory freedom, influenced by semantic specificity or fullness
- Verbs **not** strictly categorising in Wardaman, unlike other languages
- Explains discrepancy between number of inflecting verbs and number of verbs found in complex verbs?
- A gradient approach to complex verb systems?

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Thank you!*

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