

Correlates of Nonconfigurationality

In this paper I discuss some implications for analyses of nonconfigurationality using data from the Australian language Bardi. I show that despite some enticing correlations in many language, which appear to support the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (PAH), data from Bardi poses problems for such an analysis. I argue instead that many of these correlations arise not from properties of nonconfigurationality, but from pronominal semantics.

Work on languages such as Mohawk and Warlpiri (cf. Hale (1983), Jelinek (1984), Baker (1996), Speas (1990) amongst others) has resulted in the definition of a set of properties considered diagnostic of non-configurationality. These include absence of binding effects, no weak cross-over, free argument omission, no evidence for a VP node, and extensive discontinuous constituency.

In addition, various authors (particularly Baker 2000, 2003) have noted other incidental correlations which are shared by the non-configurational languages most well-known in the literature. All such properties are consistent with (and indeed, expected in) a pronominal argument analysis of nonconfigurationality (first advanced in Generative Grammar to my knowledge by Metcalfe 1975; see also Jelinek 1984). The correlations include

- no non-finite verbal forms
- no referentially defective nouns
- obligatory WH-fronting
- a weak (or non-existent) distinction between nouns and adjectives
- no non-anaphoric agreement
- no quirky case marking

While many non-configurational languages share these properties, there have been some notes in the literature concerning languages without one of these properties. For example, Rembarrnga has infinitives (Nordlinger and Saulwick 2001), and Ngalakgan has non-anaphoric agreement (Baker 2002). Bardi, however, has all the core properties of non-configurational languages but none of the predicted ancillary properties. Bardi allows interrogative pronouns in non-initial positions with interrogative meanings, and multiple interrogatives (example 1; all examples are from the author's field research). There are infinitives; these can exhibit object marking but not subject marking; moreover the valency marker is absent from infinitives (example 2). Bardi also has number mismatches between the free nominal and the verb marking (example 3). In fact, Bardi exhibits none of the ancillary properties listed above.

A language with this set of properties has not been described in the literature. At first sight it would appear to be a counterexample to the PAH. However, there are a few other aspects of Bardi syntax which lead us to a possible solution. One crucial difference between Bardi and nonconfigurational languages such as Warlpiri is that agreement itself may be nonreferential. In Warlpiri, for example, a null third person form is always definite (Austin and Bresnan 1996), whereas in Bardi such a form may be indefinite (specific), or in some cases nonreferential. It would follow, then, that adjuncts co-referential with indefinite readings of agreement would also be indefinite – this would be possible in Bardi, but not in Warlpiri. Thus this follows not from properties of nonconfigurationality, but from the semantics of the agreement morphology. Secondly, there is evidence that Bardi infinitives have reduced valency; therefore subject licensing within the verb is not really problematic because the stem does not project a subject argument. Proceeding in this fashion we can, in fact, account for all the missing properties.

Thus Bardi allows us to refine our notions of which properties in a given language are due to the language's nonconfigurational status and which are due to other factors, such as the semantics of argument morphology.

- (1) *Anggi anggabanim inarligal?*
 what who-ERG 3-TR-eat-REC.PST
 ‘Who ate what?’
- (2) *Irrrol-ong i-ng-oorroo-moonoo-ngoo=jin=irr arranga m-onji-n*
 spear-INST 3-PST-AUG-throw-APPL₂=3MIN.IO=3AUG.DO without INFIN-spear-cont.
 ‘They ‘threw’ spears at them without hitting them.’ (Metcalf 1975:103)
- (3) *Boonyjanim inarligaljirrirr aarli.*
 all-ERG 3SG-TRANS-eat-REC.PST=3AUG.IO=3AUG.DO fish
 ‘Everyone ate their fish (pl).’

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