Mirima Linguistic Forum
Thursday, 28 August 2014

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre (MDWg) would like to announce its 10th Linguistic Forum to take place on Thursday, 28th August, starting at 2pm. The forum will be held at Mirima Language Centre, Kununurra.

The following presentations are scheduled:

Presentation 1:

Prosody of Topics in Jaminjung
by Dr. Candide Simard, School of Oriental and African Studies, UK

This lecture will …

Presentation 2:

Woorlang Woorlab-gerring Woorlanga-woorr Miriwoo-biny - Gaboo Yarrang?
Talking about Talking in Miriwoong – Issues in Valency and Transitivity.
by Frances Kofod, MDWg

Please have a look at the presenters' biographies on the following page.

The Mirima Linguistic Forum is an initiative by MDWg to bring together people with an academic interest in Indigenous studies. While our focus is on language and culture, ideally with a reference to local Indigenous matters, we welcome contributions on related topics. Presentations occur in an informal and relaxed atmosphere and we leave plenty of time for discussion and exchange. The forum is open to all; if you happen to be in the Kununurra area and would like to present on a topic of interest - please let us know: info@mirima.org.au.

Our presenters

CANDIDE SIMARD is a senior teaching fellow in the Linguistics department at SOAS, UK. She wrote her PhD thesis on the prosody of Jaminjung, as part of the documentation project the endangered languages of the Victoria River District led by Prof. Eva Schulze-Berndt (funded by the Volkswagen Foundation — see http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES/projects/). She continues working on the documentation of Jaminjung, and has recently started working on Ngarinyman. Her research interests are in prosody, information structure and language contact in Australian and Oceanic languages.. She is particularly interested in developing ways to better integrate the prosodic phenomena of endangered or under-described languages in linguistic descriptions. Candide is a post-doctoral researcher with the DOBES funded project 'Discourse and prosody across language family boundaries: two corpus-based case studies on contact-induced syntactic and prosodic convergence in the encoding of information structure'.

FRANCES KOFOD has been involved in many projects to do with language and culture in the East Kimberley during the past forty years, including extensive work with all Jarragan languages (Miriwoong, Gajirrabeng, and Gija). She came to Kununurra in the 1970s to record Miriwoong language for the University of New England and completed a description of Miriwoong grammar as an MA Honours thesis in 1978. She also recorded Gajirrabeng at the request of senior speakers. In 1989 she assisted the Mirima Council in setting up the *Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre* (MDWg) which keeps functioning as a hub for Miriwoong language and cultural maintenance. Frances still works part-time for MDWg, assisting with the Miriwoong Master-Apprentice program and working on grammar, dictionary and traditional ecological knowledge projects. Since 2009, after completion of a community dictionary with Miriwoong people she has been working on the Miriwoong Grammar project with a focus on the vastly complex system of Miriwoong verbs. Her presentation will address the topic of Miriwoong speech verbs based on a preliminary analysis.

ABSTRACT:

Exploring prosody: TOPICS in Ngarinyman
by Candide Simard

Prosody serves important communicative functions, for example 1) distinguishing between sentence types – declaratives, interrogatives, or imperatives; 2) demarcating or organizing a string of words into chunks – words, phrases, sentences; and 3) marking Information Structure (IS hereafter) categories such as topic, which refers to what a sentence is about and typically represents given information, and focus, which typically represents new information about the topic (Lambrecht, 1994; Vallduví and Engdahl, 1996).

This paper presents an empirical study of the prosodic correlates of topics in Ngarinyman. We will show, firstly, how they are distinct from focused elements; and secondly, how different types of topics are realized. Our annotation system is based on the methodology developed in the QUIS project (Questionnaire on Information Structure; Skopeteas et al. 2006) and takes into account the information status (degree of accessibility) of the topic as well as its position (left vs. right edge) and its prosodic and syntactic integration into the main clause. Built from a corpus of spontaneous speech, our datasets consist of carefully selected examples of NPs serving as Aboutness, Framesetting and Contrastive topics.

Finally, many languages make use of morpho-syntactic markers to express IS categories, either exclusively or together with prosodic means. Ngarinyman has grammatical markers that only appear on some discourse-given topics, namely obligatory pronominal clitics for S or A+O (McConvell 1996). These pronominal clitics cross-reference arguments and attach to the first constituent, typically in second position (Wackernagel) but not always, they can occur either clause internally or clause externally. The motivation for the observed patterns with respect to the position of the pronominal clitics poses a challenge. Another clitic =ma, usually glossed as 'GIVEN' is also of interest. Another morphosyntactic marker in Ngarinyman that interplays with the marking of Topics/Arguments is the clitic. =ma, glossed as GIVEN and often referred to as a topic marker in existing analyses. We will report on our investigation of the interplay of the marking of topics by prosodic means with these morpho-syntactic markers.

References

Lambrecht, K. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form. Topic, focus and the mental representations of discourse referents.* vol. 71: Cambridge studies in linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McConvell, Patrick. 1996. The Functions of Split-Wackernagel Clitic Systems: Pronominal Clitics in the Ngumpin Languages (Pama-Nyungan family, Northern Australia). In A. Halpern & A. Zwicky (eds.), *Approaching Second: Second Position Clitics and Related Phenomena*, 299-332.: Stanford University: CSLI.

Skopeteas, S., Fiedler, I., Hellmuth, S., Schwarz, A., Stoel, R., Fanselow, G., Fery, C., Krifka, M. (eds.) 2006. *Questionaire on information structure (QUIS).* Potsdam: University of Potsdam.

Vallduví, E., Engdahl, E. 1996. The Linguistic Realization of Information Packaging. *Linguistics* 34.459-519.

ABSTRACT:

Woorlang Woorlab-gerring Woorlanga-woorr Miriwoo-biny - Gaboo Yarrang?
Talking about Talking in Miriwoong – Issues in Valency and Transitivity.
by Frances Kofod, MDwg

Miriwoong, along with most of the other languages in the Northern part of Australia, has two word classes that may be described as verbs; inflecting verbs (IV) having stems with three tense forms and prefixes and suffixes indicating person, mood and aspect, and un-inflecting verbs or coverbs (UV) that take a small number of mostly aspectual suffixes but otherwise carry no inflections. Miriwoong inflecting verbs (IV) are a closed class. Coverbs (UV) are an open class that can include borrowings from other languages including English. Most Miriwoong inflecting verbs may act as simple verbs. However the inflecting verbs are most commonly found acting as event classifiers in complex predicates in combination with coverbs.

Another feature shared with languages in the area is the existence of an inflecting verb that can be translated as both 'say' and 'do'. (See Knight (2008:210)). The ambiguous nature of the valency and transitivity status of SAY/DO verbs was noted by Knight (2008) and also in Ungarinyin (Rumsey 1982:157-66) and Bunuba (Rumsey 1994). Similar ambiguities exist in regard to the Miriwoong middle verb SAY/DO.

Transitivity is a particular issue for Miriwoong as unlike many Australian languages it has no ergative marking. While transitive verbs with affixes cross-referencing both subject and object are by definition 'transitive', morphologically 'intransitive', 'reflexive/reciprocal' and 'middle' verbs, cross-referencing a subject only, occur frequently in sentences containing object type noun phrases. As well as the subject/object pronominal affixes to verbs, three sets of oblique pronouns offer further opportunities to cross-reference participants in the clause. Aspectual suffixes may follow semantically bi-valent coverbs that are then combined with 'intransitive' verbs adding a further complication.

Hopper and Thompson in their 1980 paper 'Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse' outline ten parameters of transitivity and talk about a continuum of transitivity from low to high. This idea of a continuum of transitivity seems particularly useful in dealing with the complications arising from various combinations of verb, coverb, pronominal cross-referencing and nominal constituents in relation to valency and transitivity in Miriwoong.

Inflecting verbs describing speech acts in Miriwoong include 'middle', 'reflexive/reciprocal' and 'transitive' verbs. There are also a number of coverbs used to describe speech acts that combine with all inflecting verbs types. This paper is the beginning of my attempt to deal with issues of valency and transitivity through an analysis of Miriwoong verbs that speak about speech in all its forms beginning with the verb SAY/DO.

References

Hopper, P. J. and S. A. Thompson 1980 ' Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse' in *Language*, Volume 56:251-99, Number 2 (1980)

Knight, E. 2008 'Hyperpolysemy on Bunuba, a polysynthetic language of the Kimberley, Western Australia' pp 205 -221 in *Cross-Linguistic Semantics* Goddard, G. Editor John Benjamins

Rumsey, A. 1994. 'On the Transitivity of 'Say' Constructions in Bunuba' in *Australian Journal of Linguistics* Volume 14, Number 2, December 1994