

LING819: Possible and Impossible Structures

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1 Configurationality

- (1) English is a configurational language: the grammatical functions consistently appear in particular phrase structural positions.
- (2) The object and the verb make up a phrasal unit to the exclusion of the subject (Baker 2001: 407).
- (3)
 - a. Susan [_{VP} hit the table] and Bill did [_{VP} (so)] too.
 - b. Susan said she would hit the table, and [_{VP} hit the table] I guess she did -.
 - c. * [_{XP} John hit] the table and [_{XP} (so)] did the chair too.
 - d. *John said he would hit the table, and [_{XP} John hit] I guess - did it.
- (4) The subject is hierarchically higher than the object:
- (5)
 - a. John₁ washed himself₁.
 - b. John₁ washed pictures of himself₁.
 - c. Every man washed his car.
 - d. *He₁ washed Johns' ₁ car.
 - e. *Heself₁ washed John₁
 - f. *Friends of himself₁ washed John₁
- (6) Many languages do not pattern with English, and in these languages, subjects and objects cannot be identified by constituency tests and word order.
- (7) Hale (1983) shows that in Warlpiri, any order of the subject, verb and the object is possible. The only requirement is that the auxiliary that bears tense and agreements sits in the second position of the clause.
 - a. Ngarrka-ngku ka wawirri panti-rni
man-ERG AUX kangaroo speak-NONPAST
'The man is spearing the kangaroo.'
 - b. Wawirri ka panti-rni ngarrka-ngku.
 - c. Panti-rni ka ngarrka-ngku wawirri. (Hale 1983: 6)
- (8) The verb and the object do not form a constituent (Baker 2001: 410).

- (9) *Ngaju nya-nyi ka-ju kurdu-ngku.
I.ABS see-NONPAST PRES-1SGO child-ERG
'The child sees me.'
- (10) Hale (1983: 7) demonstrates that both the subject and the object can be missing. The missing elements are interpreted as pronominals.
- (11) a. Ngarrka-ngku ka pantirni.
man-ERG AUX spear-NONPAST
'The man is spearing him/her/it.'
- b. Wawirri ka pantirni.
kangaroo AUX spear-NONPAST
'He/she is spearing the kangaroo.'
- c. Pantirni ka.
spear-NONPAST AUX
'He/she is spearing him/her/it.'
- (12) Baker (2001: 410) argues that we should distinguish between two different types of 'nonconfigurationality':
1. Narrow nonconfigurationality: a language that has the characteristic cluster of features that Hale (1983) identifies for Warlpiri:
 - (a) free word order
 - (b) possible omission of all grammatical functions
 - (c) the possibility of having discontinuous NP constituents
 2. Broad nonconfigurationality: a language in which it seems difficult and/or inappropriate to use phrase structure to distinguish grammatical functions.
- (13) Hale (1983: 6) shows that Warlpiri allows discontinuous NP constituents:
- (14) a. Wawirri yalumpu kapi-rna pantirni.
kangaroo that AUX spear-NONPAST
'I will spear that kangaroo.'
- b. **Wawirri** kapi-rna pantirni **yalumpu**.
kangaroo AUX spear-NONPAST that
'I will spear that kangaroo.'
- (15) Baker (2001) argues that nonconfigurationality comes in three flavors:
1. Warlpiri
 2. Mohawk
 3. Japanese, Hindi, etc.
- (16) In Mohawk, subjects and objects do not behave differently when it comes to some anaphora phenomena. For example, a name contained in the understood direct object can be coreferential with a pronominal subject, just as the other way around.
- (17) Warlpiri does not show English-like subject/object asymmetries with respect to weak crossover.

- (18) Ngana ka nyanungu-nyangu maliki-rli wajili-pi-ny.
 who PRES he-POSS dog-ERG chase-NONPAST
 ‘Who₁ is his₁ dog chasing?’ (Baker 2001: 415).
- (19) Similarly, there is no asymmetry with respect to condition C: pronoun arguments of the verb are never coreferential with names embedded in their coarguments.
- (20) a. Jakamarra-kurlangu maliki ka nyanungu-rlu wajili-pi-ny.
 Jakamarra-POSS dog-ABS pres he-ERG chase-NONPAST
 *‘He₁ chases Jakamarra’s₁ (own) dog.’
 b. Jakamarra-kurlangu maliki-rli ka nyanungu wajili-pi-ny.
 Jakamarra-POSS dog-ERG PRES he-ABS chase-NONPAST
 *‘Jakamarra’s₁ (own) dog chases him₁’ (Baker 2001: 415)
- (21) This pattern is opposite of Mohawk:
- (22) ‘Thus, in Mohawk it seems that neither the subject nor the object c-commands the other, whereas in Warlpiri it seems that the subject c-commands the object and vice versa’ (Baker 2001: 415).
- (23) When it comes to Japanese and Hindi, anaphoric conditions like Condition C and weak crossover are crucially interrelated with word order.

2 Hale (1983) on Warlpiri

- (24) X-bar rules:
- (25) a. $X' \rightarrow X'^* X$
 b. $V' \rightarrow \text{AUX } X'^* V X'^*$
- (26) ‘Free word order can be viewed as a joint function of lexical insertion and the phrase structure rules. Since the latter do not specify categorial membership of X’ constituents (apart from tensed clauses), lexical insertion is free to instantiate them in any relative linear order whatsoever’ (Hale 1983: 8).
- (27) ‘Why does Warlpiri use a phrase structure system of this highly ‘permissible’ type? This is a more interesting question because it focusses attention on the status of phrase structure in grammatical theory, rather than simply assuming that to be a matter which is essentially settled’ (Hale 1983: 10).
- (28) ‘Specifically, I would like to explore the possibility that the typological distinction at issue here finds its origins not in phrase structure itself but, rather, in the nature of the relationship between phrase structure (PS) and LEXICAL STRUCTURE (LS)’ (Hale 1983: 11).
- (29) ‘I use the term LS to refer to the argument structure of the predicator (e.g., a verb), and I assume that the logical form (LF) of a clause is defined, by the relation of LS to PS’ (Hale 1983: 11).
- (30) The verb *panti-rni* ‘piece, poke, jab, spear, ...’ has the following LS:
- (31) [*erg_x*, *abs_y*, *panti-rni*]

- (32) Hale suggests the following linking rule (p. 14):
- (33) Co-index N' in PS with *arg* in LS, provided the case category of N' is identical to that of *arg* (assigning a distinct index to each *arg* in LS).
- (34) Hale suggests that the fundamental difference between configurational and nonconfigurational languages is to be found in the relation between LS and PS.
- (35) *The Projection Principle*
 Representations at each syntactic level (i.e., LF, and D- and S-structure) are projected from the lexicon, in that they observe the subcategorization properties of lexical items (Chomsky 1981: 29).
- (36) Hale's version of the Projection Principle:
- (37) If *verb* selects *arg* at L_i , then *verb* selects *arg* at L_j (where L_i, L_j range over the 'levels' LF, D-structure, S-structure in the syntactic representation of clauses) (Hale 1983: 25).
- (38) *The configurationality parameter* (Hale 1983: 26):
- (39) a. In configurational languages, the projection principle holds of the pair (LS, PS).
 b. In non-configurational languages, the projection principle holds of LS alone.
- (40) 'It will follow, then, that Warlpiri, being non-configurational, cannot have NP-movement rules, since the notion 'argument position' applies only to LS - there are, strictly speaking, no argument positions in PS, where the category NP (or N') is instantiated. And, in general, in non-configurational languages, rules like the passive, where they exist, are necessarily lexical rules, not rules of syntax operating in PS' (Hale 1983: 28).
- (41) 'For configurational languages, the project principle forces the appearance in PS of certain categories of constituents not needed, and evidently not used, in non-configurational languages. One such category is the base-generated empty element [$_{NP} e$], which presumably is involved in the passive construction [...]' (Hale 1983: 28-29).
- (42) 'Since the projection principle holds only of LS, there will be no necessary correlation between the morphological case of a nominal and its position in PS. A given language whether configurational or nonconfigurational, may or may not utilize morphological case to encode the grammatical functions of nominals in PS. A language which does not utilize morphological case simply fails to invoke the generalized Linking Rule; and case in such a language is entirely abstract' (Hale 1983: 29).

3 English versus nonconfigurational languages

- (43) Hale (1983) shows that object can be referentially dependent on the subject, but the subject cannot be dependent on the object.
- (44) a. Kurdu-jarra-rlu ka-pala-nyanu paka-rni.
 child-DUAL-ERG PRES-3SUBJ-REFLO strike-NONPAST
 'The two children are striking themselves/each other' (Hale 1983: 21)

- b. Ngarrka ka-nyanu nya-nyi.
 man.ABS PRES-REFL see-NONPAST
 ‘He sees himself as a man’ (*Heself₁ sees the man₁)
- (45) These facts are exactly parallel to the English facts we saw above.
- (46) Hale furthermore discusses control structures. Both subject and object control are possible, but only the subject of a non-finite clause can be null.
- (47) a. Purda-nya-nyi ka-rna-ngku [wangka-nja-kurra]
 aural-perceive-NONPAST PRES-1SUBJ-2OBJ speak-INF-COMP
 ‘I hear you speaking.’
- b. Marlu-ku ka-rna-rla wurruka-nyi [marna
 kangaroo-DAT PRES-1SUBJ-RLA stalk-NONPAST grass
 nga-rninja-kurra(-ku)]
 eat-INF-COMP-DAT
 ‘I am sneaking up on the kangaroo (while it is) eating grass.’
 (Hale 1983: 20)
- (48) Infinitivals marked with the complementizer *-kurra* are controlled by the matrix object, whereas infinitivals marked by *-karra* are controlled by the matrix subject.
- (49) a. Ngarrka-ngku ka purlapa yunpa-rni [karli
 man-ERG PRES corroboree sing-NONPAST boomerang
 jarnti-rninja-karra-rlu]
 trim-INF-COMP-ERG]
 ‘The man is singing a corroboree song while trimming the boomerang.’ (Hale 1983: 20)
- b. Karnta ka-ju wangka-mi [yarla karla-nja-karra]
 woman PRES-1OBJ speak-NONPAST yam dig-INF-COMP]
 ‘The woman is speaking to me while digging yams.’ (Hale 1983: 21)
- (50) ‘There are in principle two ways to react to this kind of conflict, both of which involve positing additional levels of representation. The standard principles-and-parameters style approach is to say that Warlpiri does have a syntactic representation (such as S-structure, or LF) in which the subject asymmetrically c-commands the object, just as in English. The principles regulating things like anaphora then apply at that level in the usual way. However, for some extrinsic reason this structure is disrupted, so that the verb and the object do not form a constituent on the surface, at least at the level of PF.
- The alternative is to say that these facts show that grammatical dependencies such as anaphora and control are not sensitive to phrase structure after all, but rather to grammatical functions or thematic roles that are characterized apart from phrase structure.’ (Baker 2001: 412)
- (51) ‘Both theories involve attributing two distinct representations to Warlpiri, one which is more universal (and hence more English-like) and one which represents more accurately the surface facts of the language’ (Baker 2001: 412).

References

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