

A comparison of word order and the intonational phrasing of noun phrases in two languages

Oral/poster

This paper will examine the relationship between word order and the intonational phrasing of noun phrases (NPs) in two Australian languages with vast differences in grammatical structure; one a polysynthetic head-marking language and the other a dependent-marking language with extreme morphological marking of dependents. It might be assumed that these differences in grammatical structure may be reflected in differences in intonational phrasing. This is not the case, however, with intonational phrasing behaving similarly in the two languages, providing evidence for the independence of intonation and grammatical structure in the linguistic system.

Findings of a corpus of spontaneous speech reveal that NP ellipsis is common in both languages, as found in Australian languages generally (Bowe, 1990; Bowern, 2008; Evans, 2003), suggesting that the very presence of an NP indicates that its status is marked in the discourse (e.g. Bowern, 2008; Mushin, 2005). Furthermore, the word order of clauses is very similar in the two languages. In both languages, the position of the NP in the clause serves distinct discourse functions. Pre-verbal NPs serve to introduce a new topic or new information to the discourse, provide contrast, or add drama or emphasis to the narrative, while post-verbal NPs serve to elaborate, highlight or clarify referents. These findings are in line with studies of other Australian languages (Bowe, 1990; Evans, 2003; Laughren, et al., 2005; Mithun 1987; Simpson & Mushin, 2008).

Some differences between the two languages do arise, however, in terms of the intonational phrasing of the argument and adjunct NPs in certain environments. This paper will examine the similarities and differences of intonational phrasing of NPs in relation to word order and discourse structure.

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