

Morpheme order and templatic morphology: evidence from Murrinh-Patha (Australia)

If questions concerning affix ordering are among the central ones in morphological theory, then languages with templatic morphology appear to provide the least interesting answer, since in these languages affix order must be simply stipulated in the form of arbitrary position classes. For this reason, much recent research into templatic morphology has attempted to show that affix order in such languages *is* in fact governed by underlying semantic or syntactic principles (e.g. Baker 1985, Bybee 1985, Rice 2000, McDonough 2000). It remains an issue of some debate whether or not such approaches can be extended to all languages with templatic morphological structures (see, among others, Inkelas 1993, Stump (1993, 1997, 2001), Spencer 2003 for discussion). In this paper I bring new data to the debate from Murrinh-Patha, and other Daly River languages from Northern Australia. I show that this data cannot be adequately accounted for by syntactic or semantic accounts of affix ordering, but rather provide strong support for the existence of templatic organization in morphological systems.

Murrinh-Patha and other Daly River languages are polysynthetic head-marking languages whose verbal structures share many of the properties traditionally associated with templatic systems (e.g. as typified by Athabaskan languages (Young and Morgan 1987, Kari 1989, Rice 2000 among many others)). For example, verbs have complex morphological structures, exhibiting extensive multiple exponence, and the interspersal of both inflectional and derivational information. In the Murrinh-Patha example in (1) we see that the ‘past imperfective’ feature (PstImpf) is marked in both the first slot (*dirra*) and following the stem (*dha*), while the indirect object information is distributed across the second position indirect object marker (*nku*) and the number marker (*ngime*) at the end of the verb. In (2) we see that it is also possible to incorporate body parts and adverbial markers into the middle of this verbal complex.

Another feature of the verbal template in these languages is that a single position in the verb can be filled with material of disparate functions. The second position in the verbal template is filled by *either* an object marker (as in (1)) *or* a subject number marker (as in (3)).

Rice (2000) argues extensively against the traditional templatic analysis of Athabaskan verbs, arguing instead that a significant portion of the ordering within the verb can be attributed to properties of scope. The question, then, is whether a similar account could be given for other languages with similarly templatic systems. In Murrinh-Patha, however, there are reasons for preferring a template analysis. For example, a templatic account predicts that elements which fill the same position in the template should be in complementary distribution in that position, even in a situation where they would both be semantically appropriate. In Murrinh-Patha, as shown in (1) and (3), dual subject number markers and object markers both fill the same slot in the verbal template. In a transitive verb with a dual subject (and 1/2 person object), the direct object marker takes precedence for this slot, and the dual subject marker appears instead at the end of the verb, as shown in the contrast between (3) and (4).

Since the scope of the dual subject marker is the same irrespective of its position, its variable positioning cannot be attributed to scope effects. Rather, its position is completely determined by the presence or absence of the direct object marker in slot 2. The incompatibility of these two elements in this position is predicted on a templatic account, but more problematic on an account that attributes ordering principles to scopal properties. Further evidence against a scope-based analysis for these languages will be presented from cross-linguistic comparison of Murrinh-Patha and related Daly River languages, where ordering relationships predicted to be stable by the scope-based approach in fact vary across languages of the region.

- (1) *dirra-nku-wintharrarr-dha-ngime*
3sgS.PstImpf-3paucIO-see-PstImpf-pauc.f
'He was looking for the few women.'
- (2) *ma-nhi-rdarri-purl-deyida-nu*
1sgS.Fut-2sgO-back-wash-again-Fut
'I will wash your back again.'
- (3) *bangam-ngintha-ngkardu*
3S.nFut-du.f-see
'They two saw him/her.'
- (4) *bangam-ngi-ngkardu-ngintha*
3S.nFut-1sgO-see-du.f
'They two saw me.'

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