

## 1. Mawng

Mawng is an Australian Aboriginal language:

- Spoken by around three hundred people in the Cobourg peninsula area, North-west Arnhem land
- Iwaidjan language family, non-Pama Nyungan group
- Endangered but still being acquired by children



Cobourg peninsula and adjacent areas of North-West Arnhem land

### Location

- Mawng has traditionally been spoken by people living on a coastal stretch of land between Iwaidja and Gunbarlang speaking people
- Fieldwork was carried out between April-May 2005 at Warruwi community, South Goulburn Island, on traditional Mawng land

### Typological profile

- Five genders
- Free ordering of NPs with respect to predicate
- Verbal cross-referencing of subject and object
- Ellipsis of NPs is common when referent is given or recoverable from context
- Most content words receive a pitch accent

## 2. Information Structure

Information structure is encoded in Mawng through:

- Intonation
- Word order
- Choice of referring expression

### Intonation

- Most content words in Mawng receive a pitch accent as in the nearby languages Iwaidja (Birch forth.) and Bininj Gun-wok (Bishop 2002)
- Function words are usually unstressed
- Manipulation of the pitch range is important to foregrounding/backgrounding at the clause-level

### Word order

- Mawng is similar to many other Australian languages in that it has relatively free ordering of NPs (Hale 1983)
- Word order is used in the encoding of information structure: fronting of NPs is used for topicalisation of most referents and focussing of nonhuman objects

### Choice of referring expression

- There are a wide range of choices of referring expressions that can be used in Mawng.
- The minimal expression of a core argument is verbal cross-referencing alone but any of the forms below may be used in addition to verbal cross-referencing:
  1. Free pronoun
  2. Demonstrative
  3. Lexical NP: with or without article
  4. More than one lexical NP may refer to the same participant

## 3. Aims of the project

1. Develop the basic tools for describing Mawng intonation using a tone-target model
2. Further our understanding of the encoding of information structure in Mawng through the application of the prepared elicitation tasks

In particular:

- The use of intonation to encode information structure
- Interaction between the use of intonation and other means of encoding information structure
- The function of the article which is not found in other Australian languages and is still poorly understood

## 4. Empirical observations

### Intonation

Little was known about Mawng intonation before the start of this work. A basic inventory of tones has been developed to describe the data:

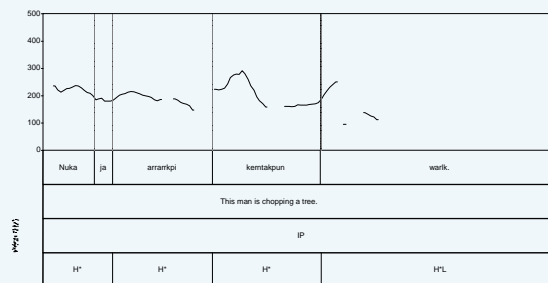
- H\* Typical pitch accent found on non-function words
- L+H\* Special pitch accent sometimes used in contrastive contexts

- L% Typical boundary tone
- H% Continuative boundary tone
- LH% Question boundary tone

The L+H\* pitch accent is used infrequently so the transcription of pitch accents does not in itself provide information about which is the most prominent pitch accent in an IP

For example, the verb *kerntakpun* 'he is chopping' has the most prominent pitch accent in the sentence illustrated below.

The first or the last word typically have the highest pitch accent in an IP so either the verb is given special prominence in this example which is probably related to its all-new context



Data number mph-rs-1-26-6: an all-new context

### The interaction between intonation and morphosyntax

Some interesting results have already come to light regarding the interaction between use of intonation and use of other means of encoding information structure

The two main means of encoding focus are rarely combined: these are fronting of an NP and use of the less common L+H\* pitch accent.

Fronting of an NP already gives it special prominence so it is rare for this strategy to be combined with the use of the L+H\* pitch accent. Instead the L+H\* pitch accent is used on NPs which have contrastive focus/topic and occur in situ.

## 5. Summary/Future Work

At this stage it is clear that there is interaction between the use of intonation and other means of encoding information structure. The aim of the next phase is to find out more about the interaction between word order and intonation and the use of the article in encoding information structure

### References

- Birch, Bruce (forthcoming) *Prosody in Iwaidja*, PhD thesis, Department of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, University of Melbourne.
- Bishop, Judith Bronwyn (2002) *Aspects of intonation and prosody in Bininj gun-wok: autosegmental-metrical analysis*, PhD thesis, Department of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, University of Melbourne.
- Hale, Kenneth. 1983. Warlpiri and the Grammar of non-configurational languages. *Natural language and linguistic theory* 1:5-47.